

MARVEL

1

WHAT IF...? DARK

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VENOM



The Marvel Universe is filled with infinite possibilities. One small choice can change the course of history and set the universe on any number of different paths. What if those choices, those moments, turned the situation...dark?

WHAT IF...? DARK

VENOM

When **SPIDER-MAN** received a new costume during **SECRET WARS**, he was unaware it was a living symbiote that was bonded to him. After having tests run by **REED RICHARDS**, A.K.A. **MR. FANTASTIC** of the **FANTASTIC FOUR**, the symbiote was removed and kept in a cage.

BEN GRIMM, A.K.A. the Ever-Lovin', Blue-Eyed **THING**, was a founding member of the **FANTASTIC FOUR**, but after the events of **SECRET WARS**, he went out on his own, leaving the FF.

What if...when Ben Grimm returns to the Fantastic Four, he finds the symbiote still locked up, and these two moments in time begin to collide...?

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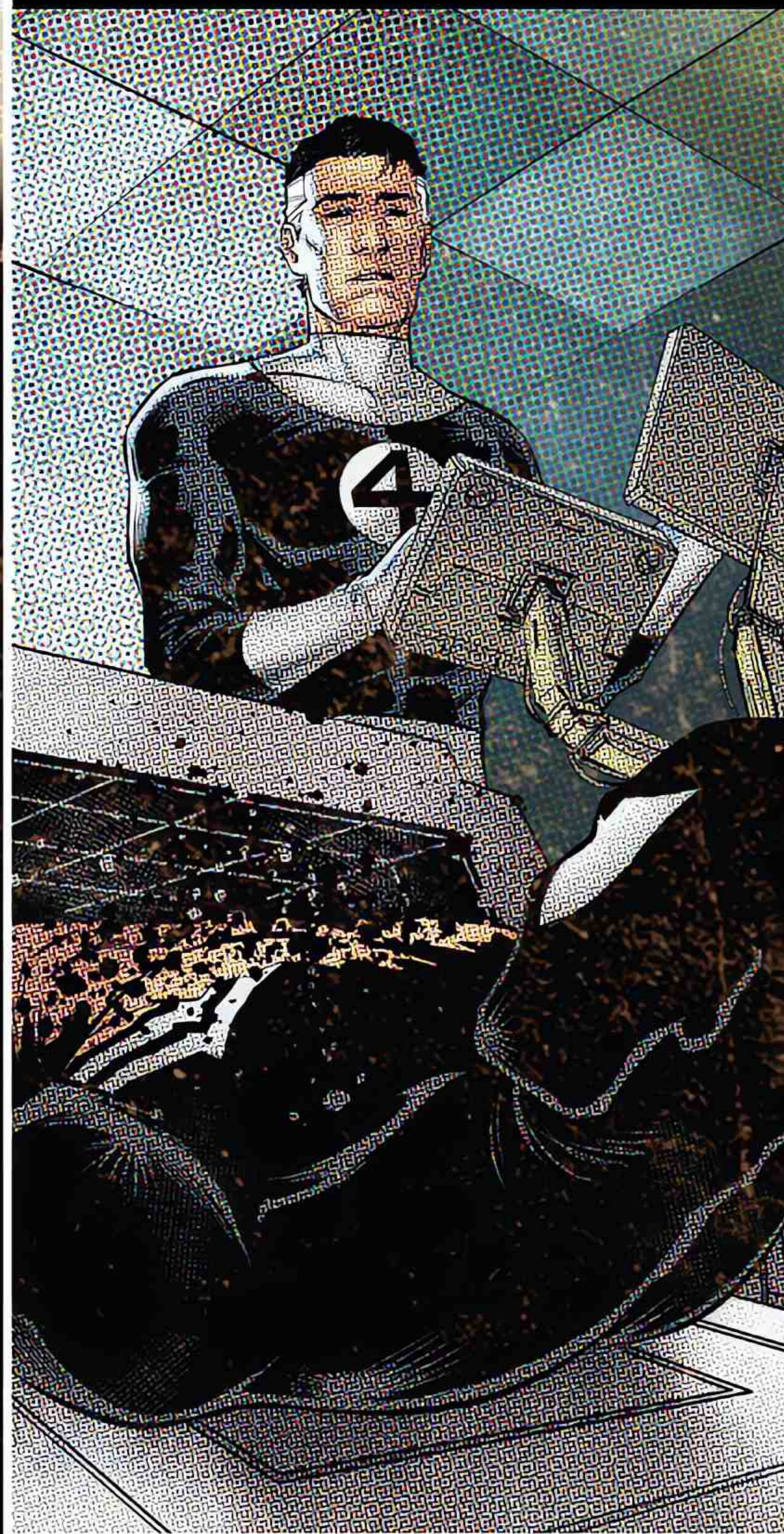
The war.



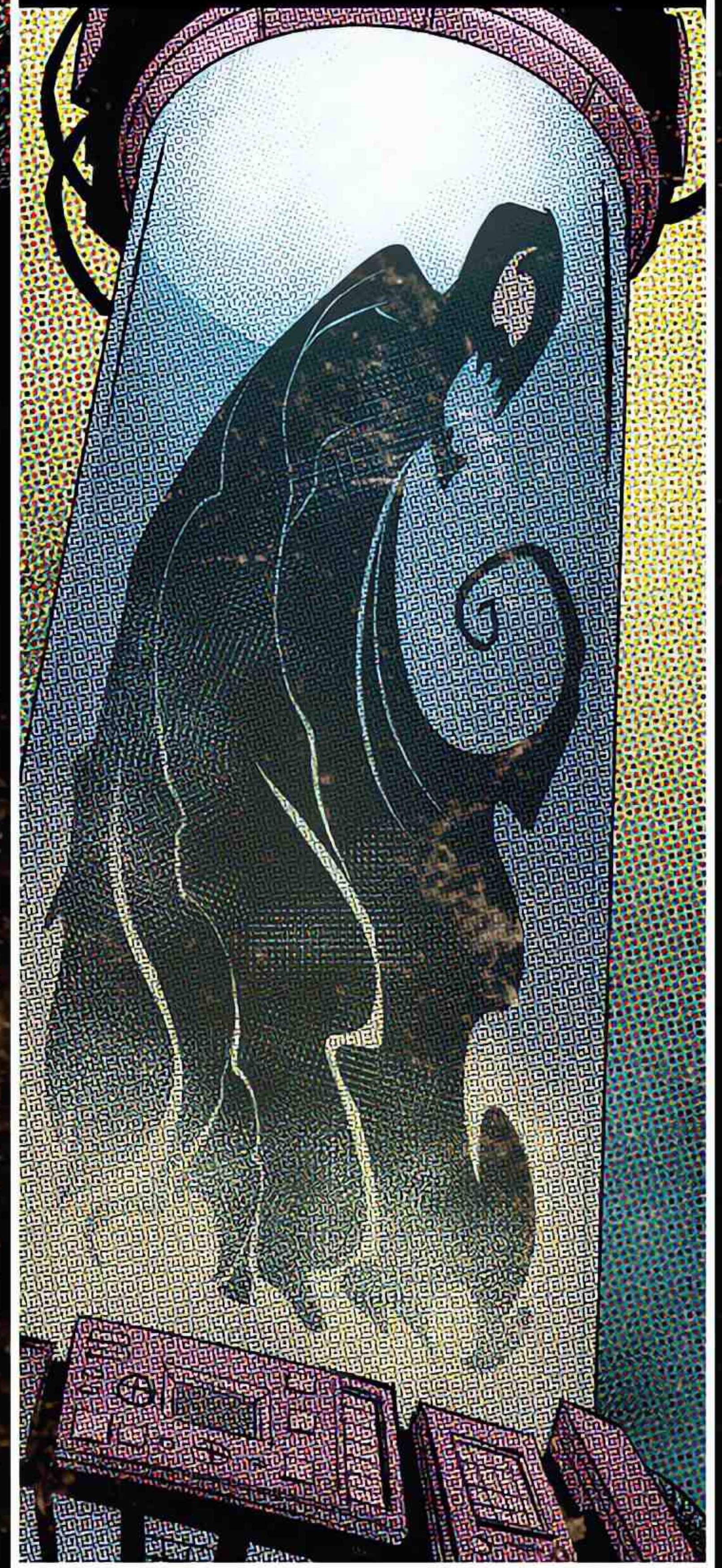
The suit.



The scientist.



The cage...



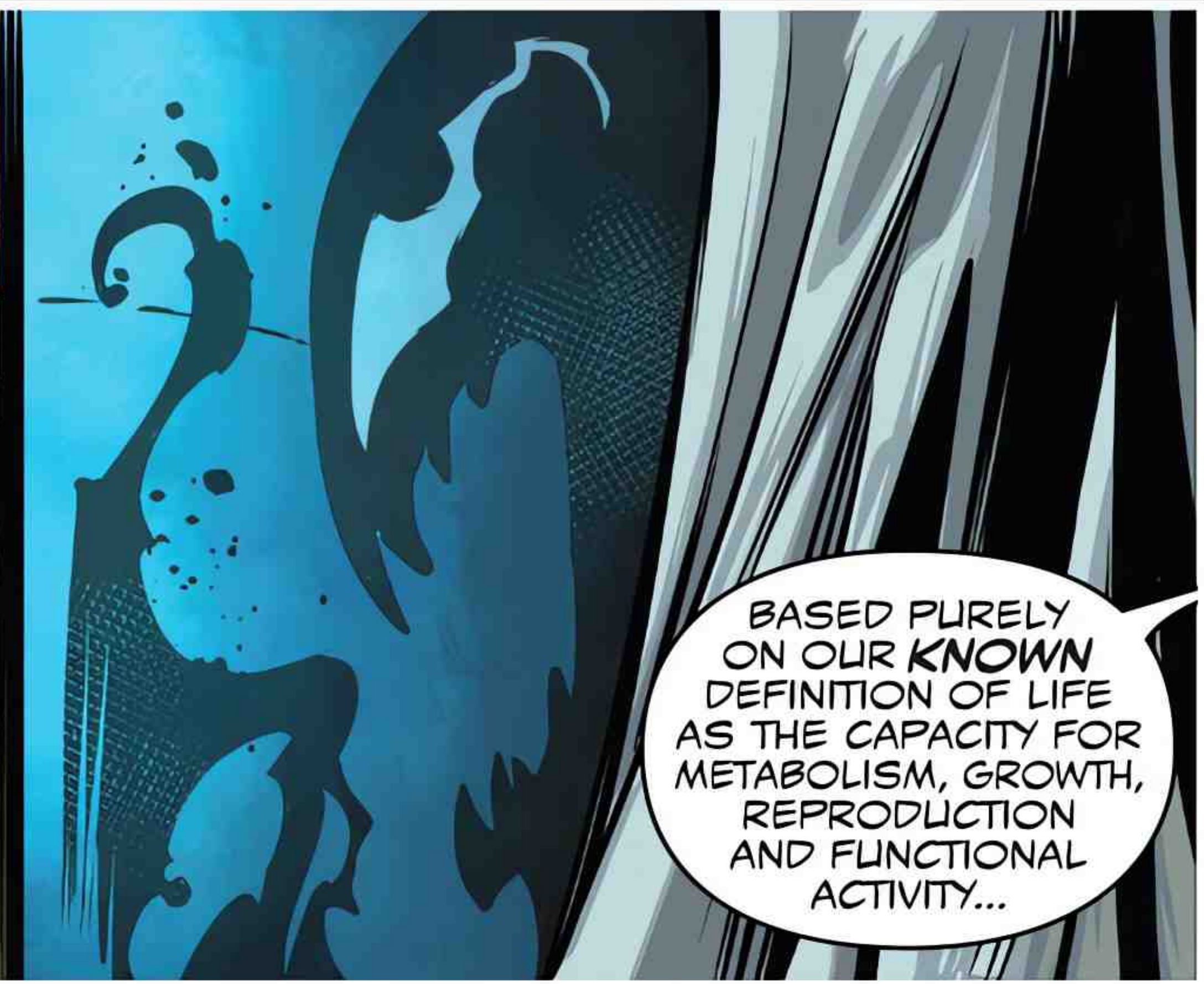
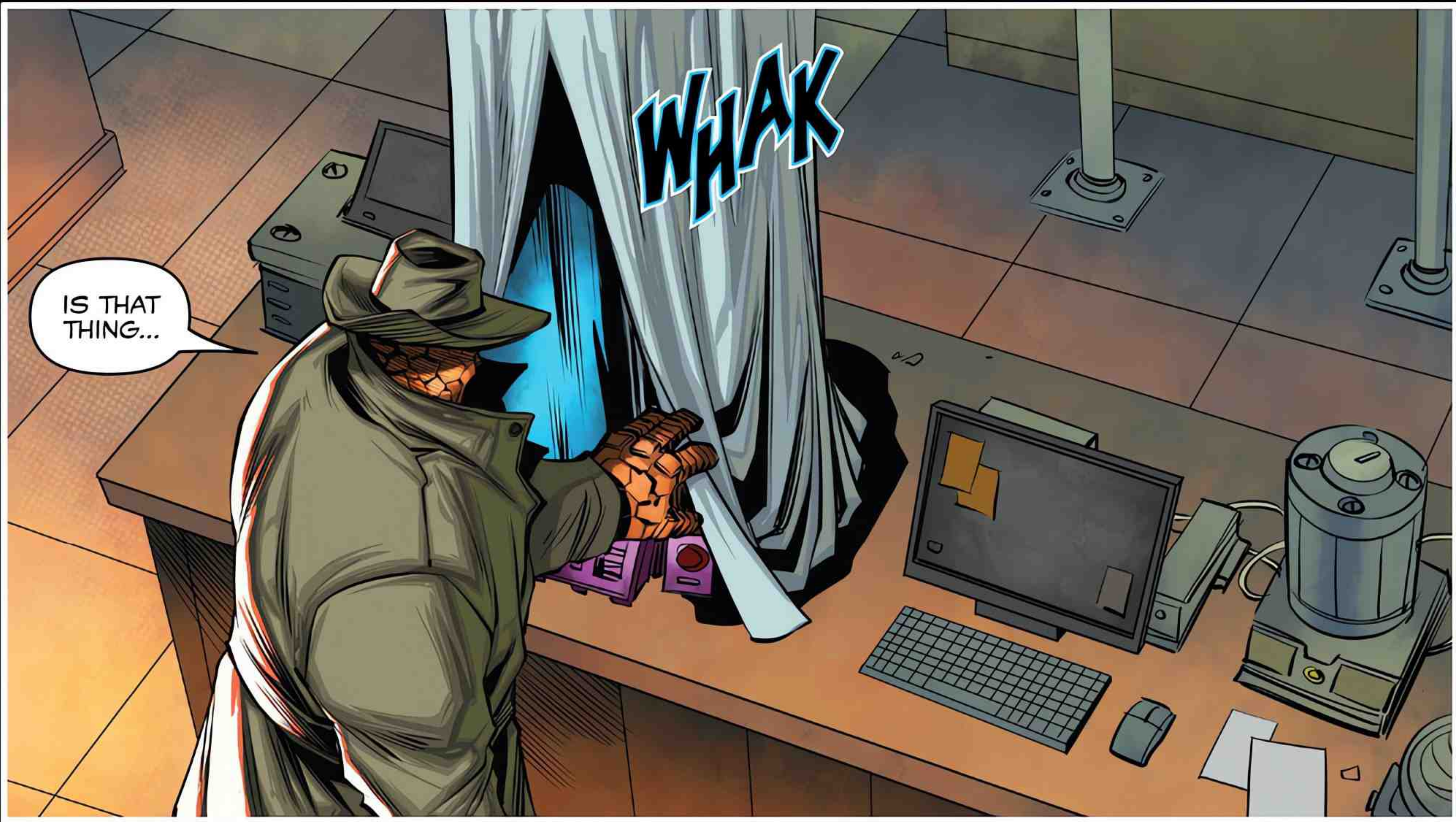
THE BAXTER BUILDING.

...and the Thing.

REED?

YA IN HERE? WE WAS SUPPOSED TO MEET OUT AT THE CRASH SITE.

WORLD'S SMARTEST GUY AND YET HE'D FORGET ABOUT A DAY LIKE TODAY...





...I'D SAY IT'S
SURELY **ALIVE**...
BUT **SENTIENT** IS
ANOTHER MATTER
ENTIRELY.

IT'S
FASCINATING,
REALLY. AN ORGANIC,
SYMBIOTIC BEING THAT
RETURNED TO EARTH
ATTACHED TO OUR WEB-
SLINGING COLLEAGUE
IN THE FORM OF
A **COSTUME**.



AFTER **DETACHING** THE SYMBIOTE FROM
SPIDER-MAN, WE'VE KEPT IT HERE FOR
FURTHER STUDY AND EVALUATION.

OF COURSE,
IT HAS GARNERED
PLENTY OF INTEREST...
WE'VE HAD MORE THAN
A FEW **BREAK-IN**
ATTEMPTS.

ALL
UNSUCCESSFUL
THANKS TO OUR
NEW SECURITY
PROTO--



YOU
FORGOT OUR
ANNIVERSARY,
REED.

I DIDN'T
FORGET,
BEN.

YOU'VE **JUST**
RETURNED FROM
MONTHS IN SPACE AND,
CONSIDERING WHAT THIS
DATE MEANS FOR **YOU**...
I FIGURED IT WAS BEST
TO ALLOW YOU TO
PROCESS THINGS
ON YOUR OWN.



**TELL THE
TRUTH**. YER AFRAID
OF FEELIN' **GUILTY**
FOR WHAT
YA DID...

...FOR
TURNIN' ME INTO
A **MONSTER**.



MAYBE YA
SHOULDA PUT
ME IN A GLASS
JAR TOO, MR.
FANTASTIC.

YOU **KNOW** THAT
I DO **EVERYTHING**
I CAN TO FIND A CURE
FOR YOU, BEN, AND I
WON'T **EVER** STOP
UNTIL I DO.

YOU'RE MY
FAMILY, AND I'D DO
ANYTHING--



REED, DARLING, THE REPORTER IS HERE WAITING FOR YOU. YOU SAID YOU'D BE BACK IN JUST A MINUTE.

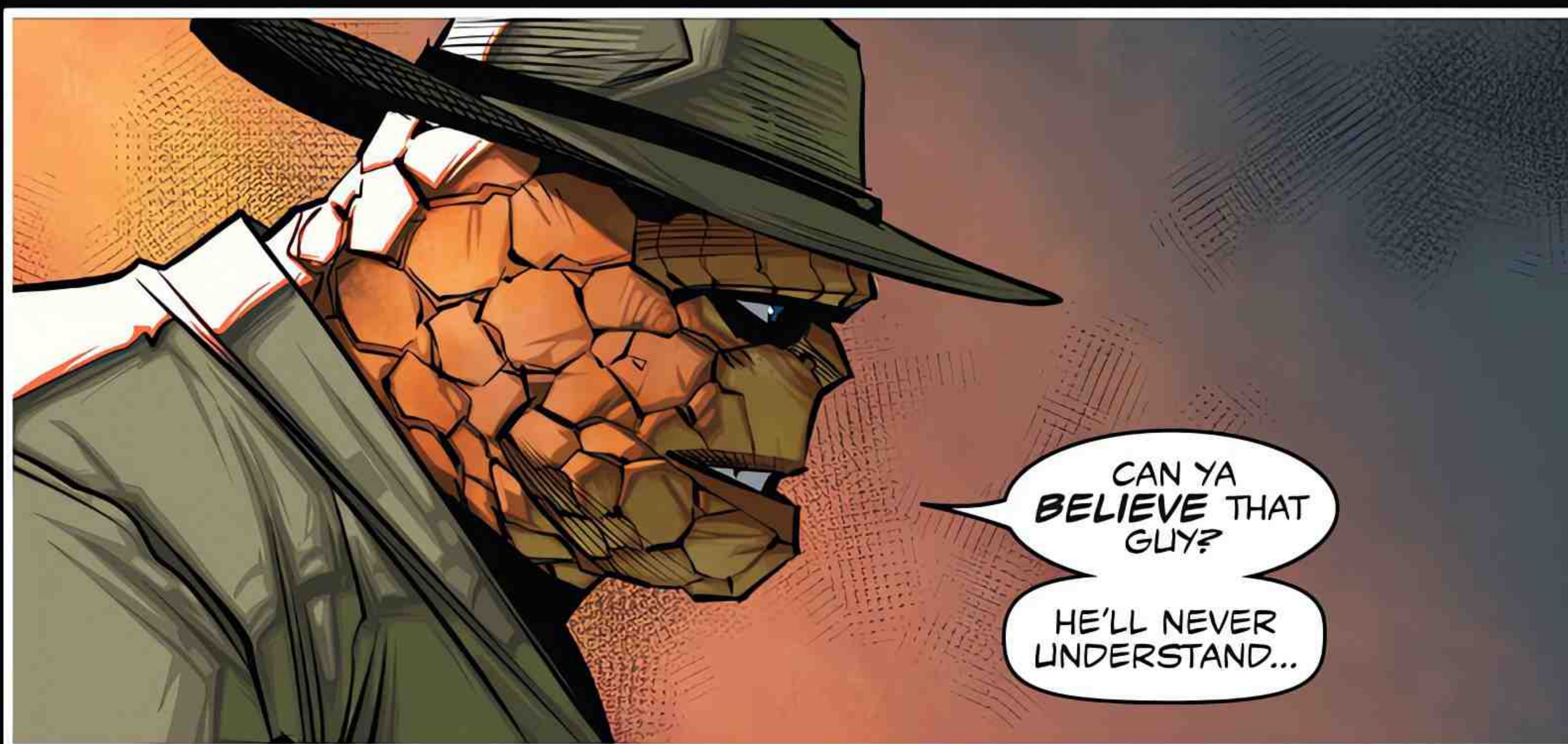
SORRY ABOUT THAT, SUE. I'M ON MY WAY NOW.



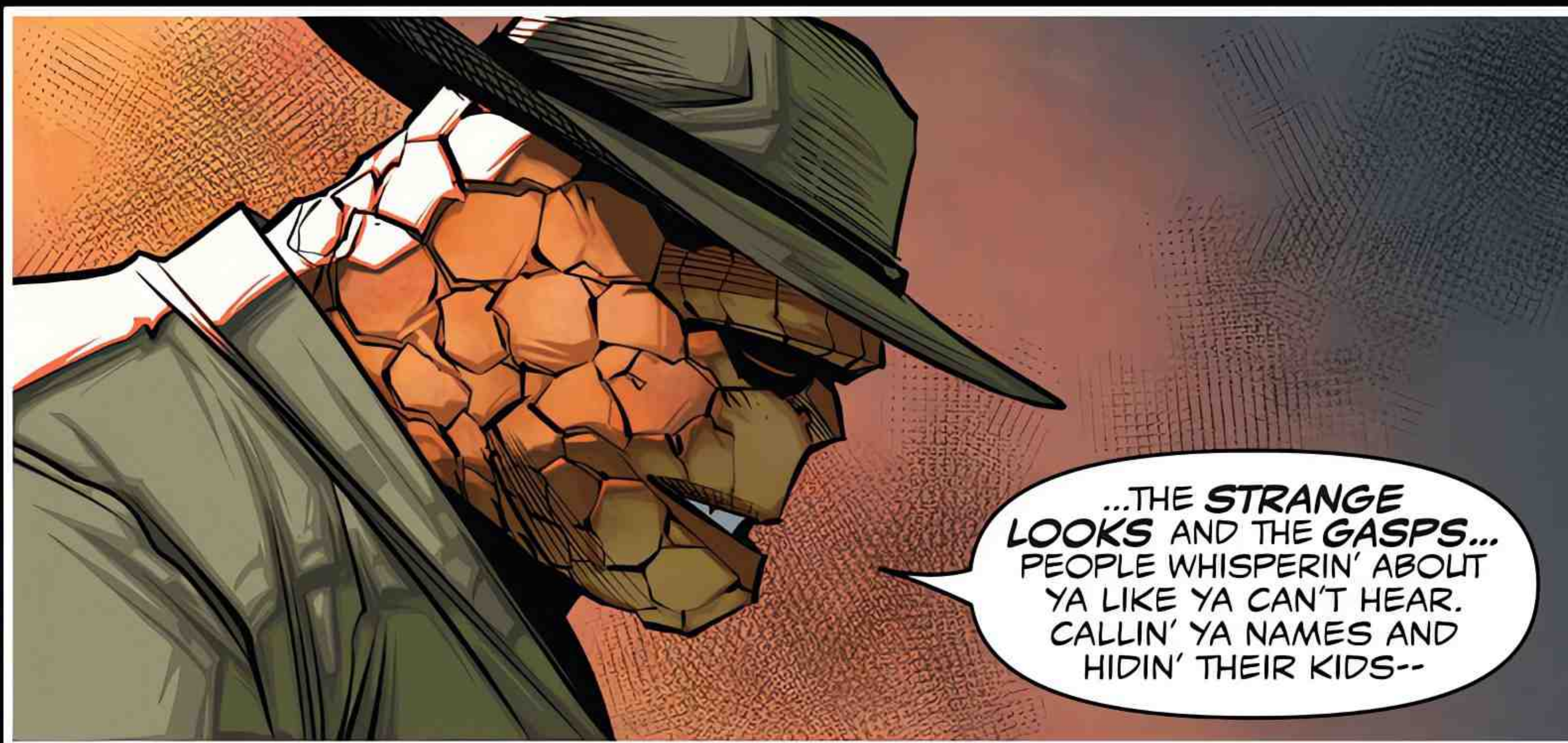
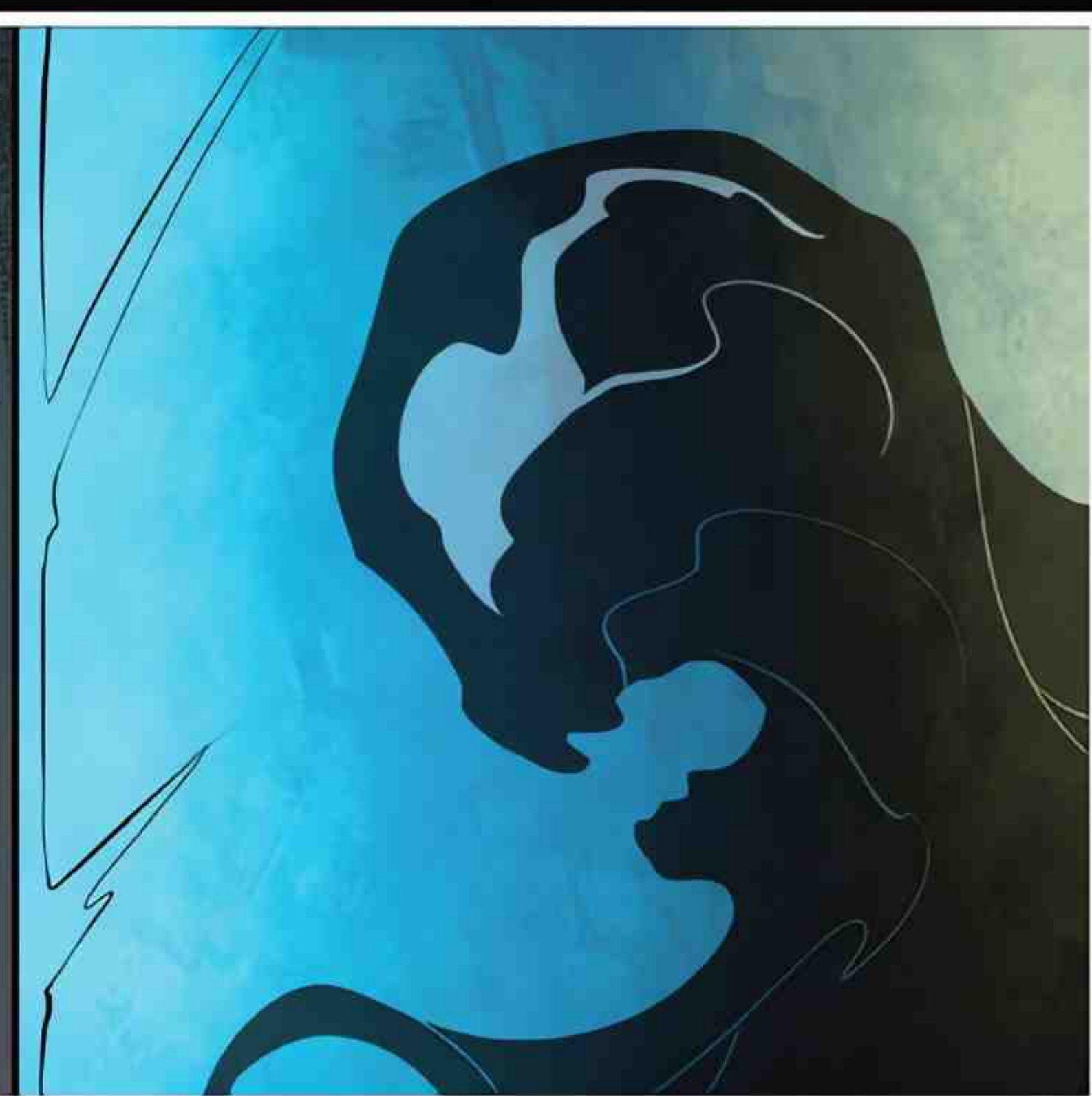
WE'LL CONTINUE THIS LATER, BEN.

YOU SHOULD COME BY FOR DINNER...I HEAR SHE-HULK IS TRYING HER HAND AT LASAGNA.

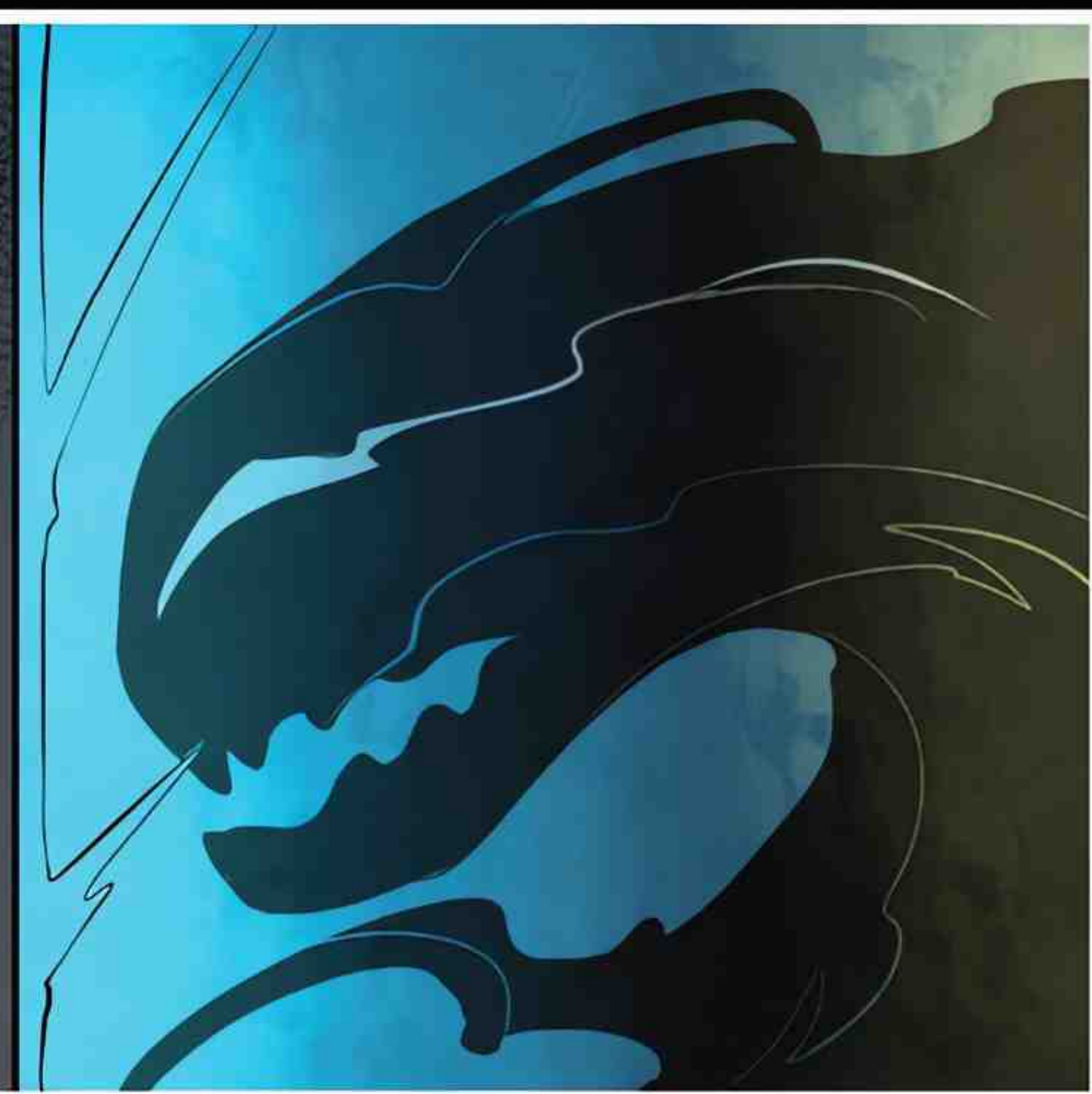
YEAH...SURE. I'LL CHECK MY SCHEDULE.



CAN YA BELIEVE THAT GUY?
HE'LL NEVER UNDERSTAND...

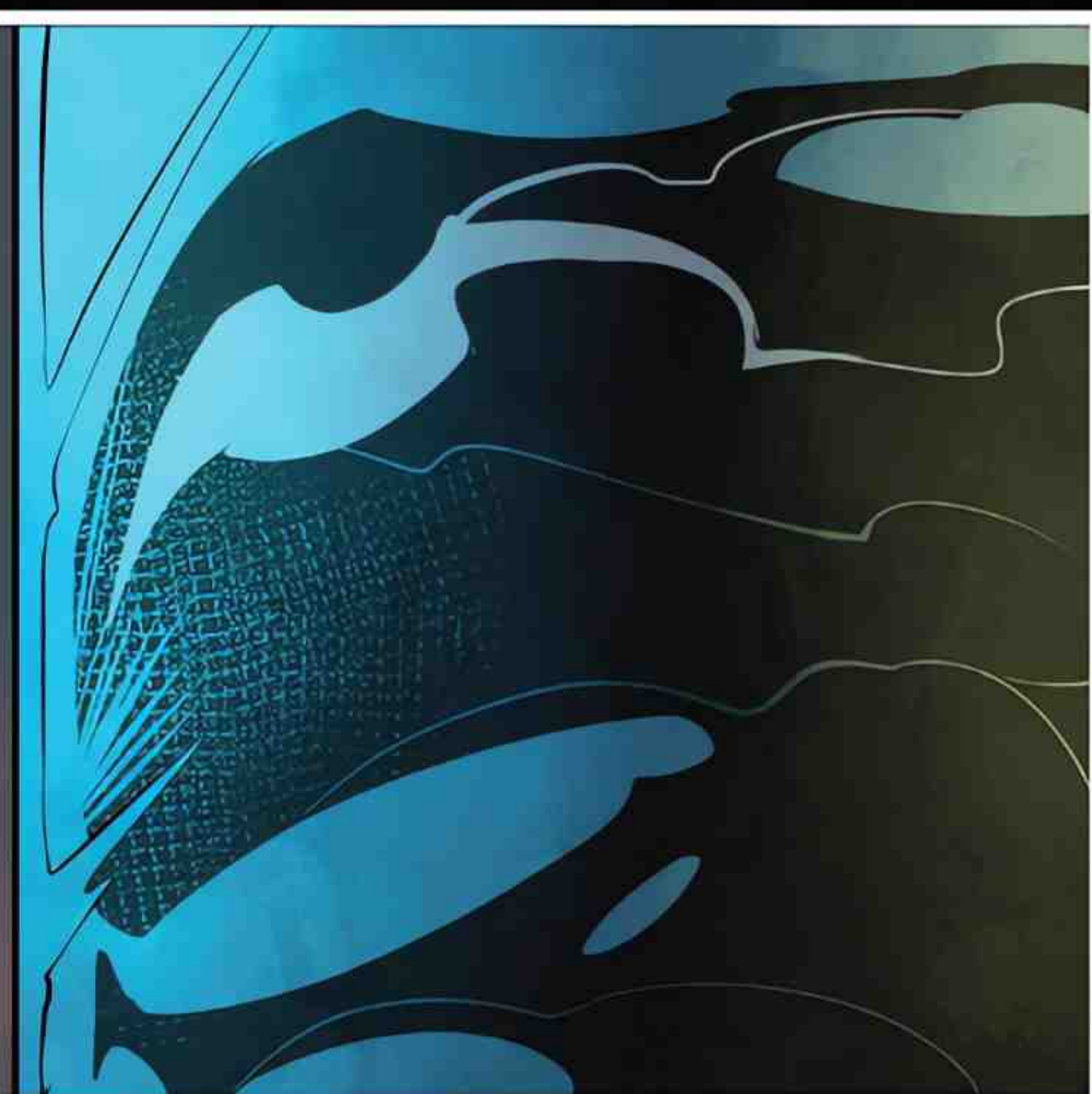


...THE STRANGE LOOKS AND THE GASPS... PEOPLE WHISPERIN' ABOUT YA LIKE YA CAN'T HEAR. CALLIN' YA NAMES AND HIDIN' THEIR KIDS--



WHAK

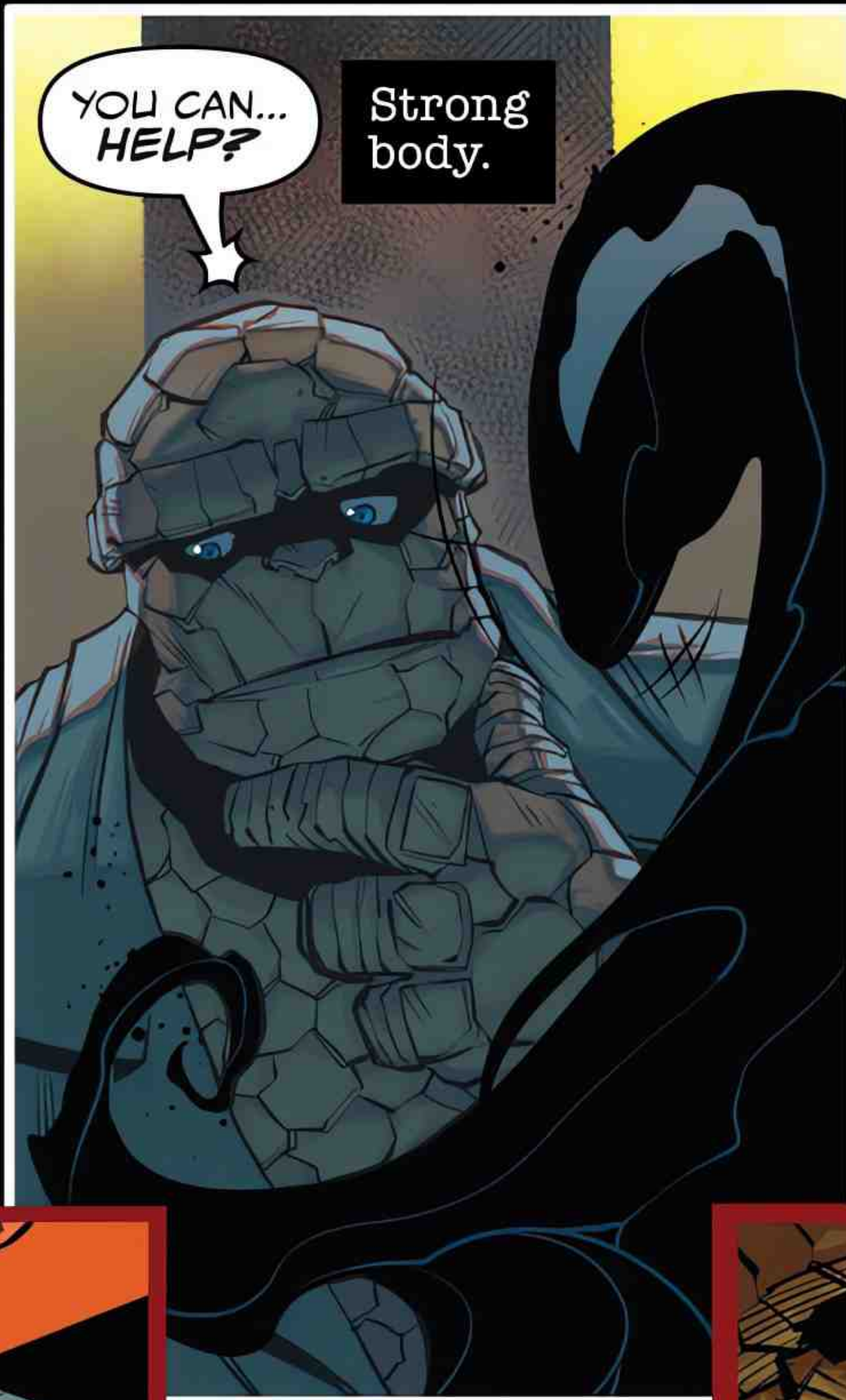
HEY, WHAT'RE YA TRYIN' TA--?





I'M SORRY,
BUT I CAN'T...
I CAN'T LET
YA OUT.

Weak man.



YOU CAN...
HELP?

Strong
body.



I HELP
YOU...



...YOU
HELP
ME.



Perfect
host.



A host more
suited to the
symbiote's
proclivities
than the
web-slinger.

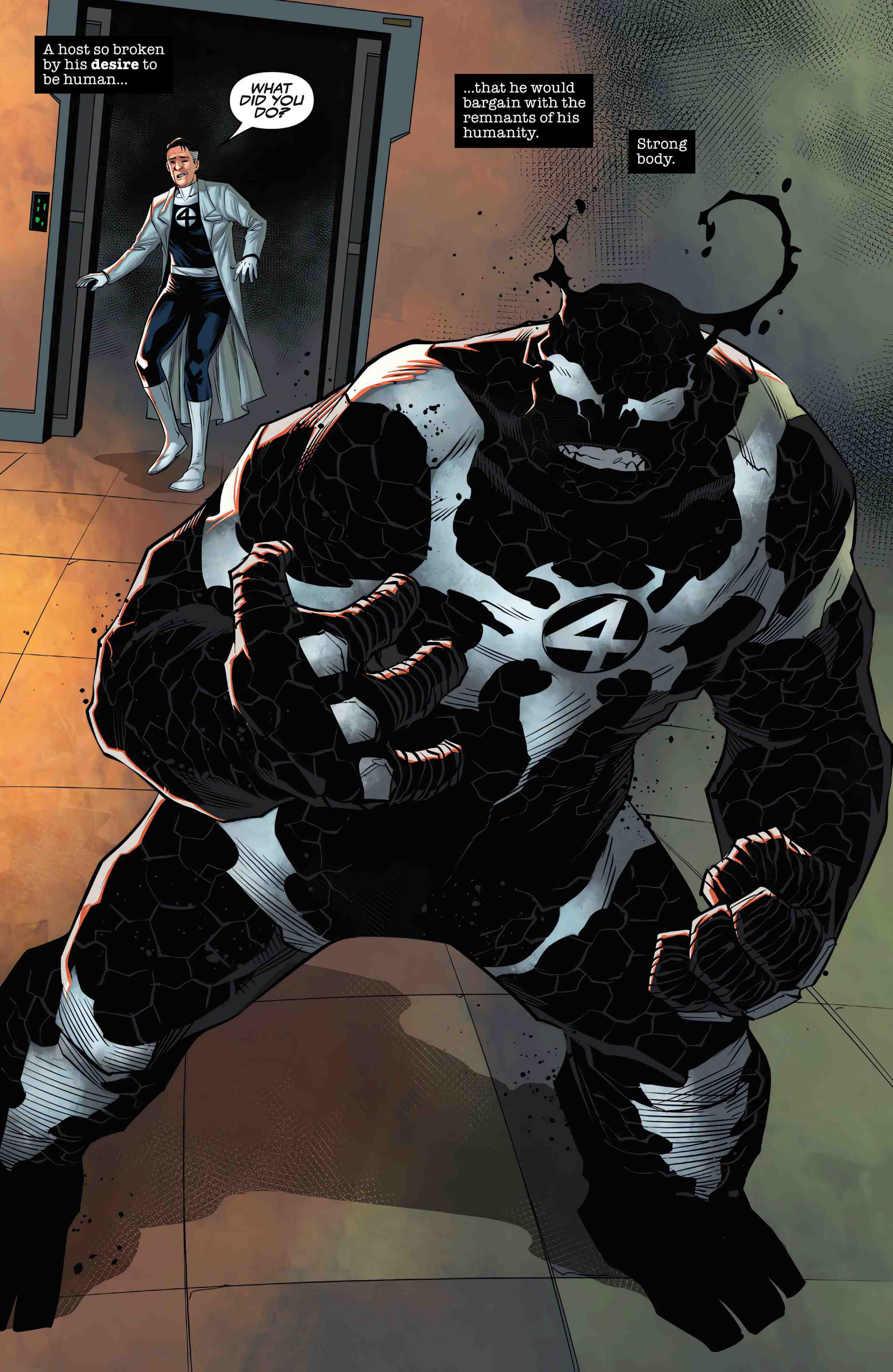
BEN, ARE
YOU STILL IN
HERE? I HEARD
A LOUD--

A host so broken
by his **desire** to
be human...

WHAT
DID YOU
DO?

...that he would
bargain with the
remnants of his
humanity.

Strong
body.





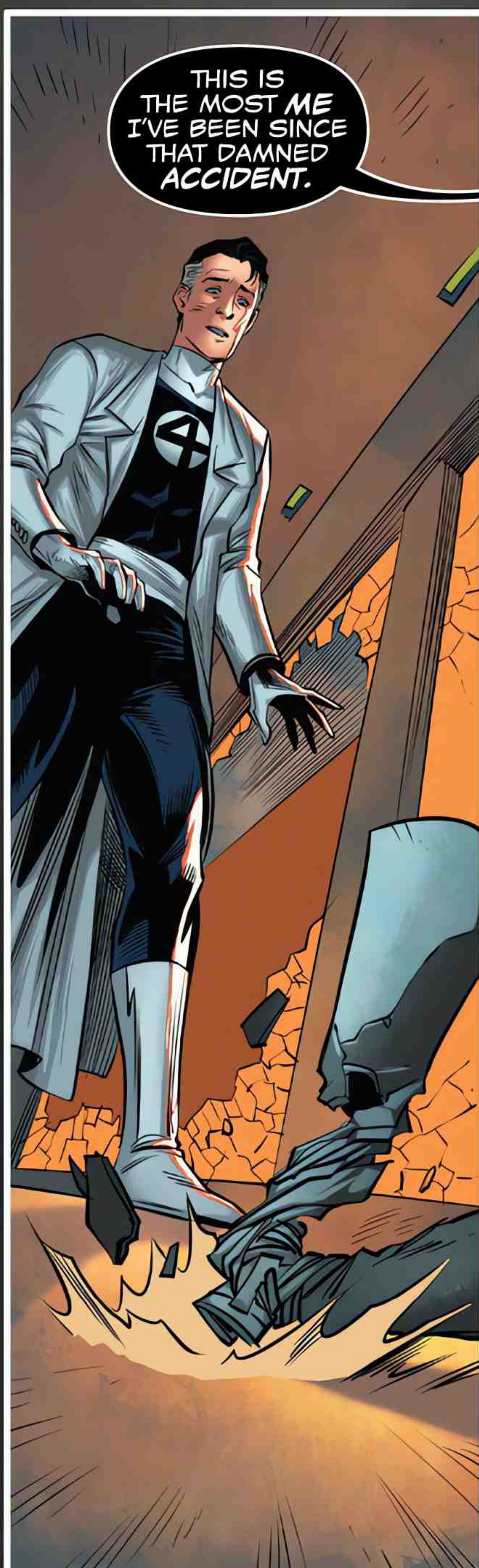




...THIS
ISN'T THE REAL
YOU.



THAT'S WHERE
YOU'RE DEAD
WRONG, PAL.



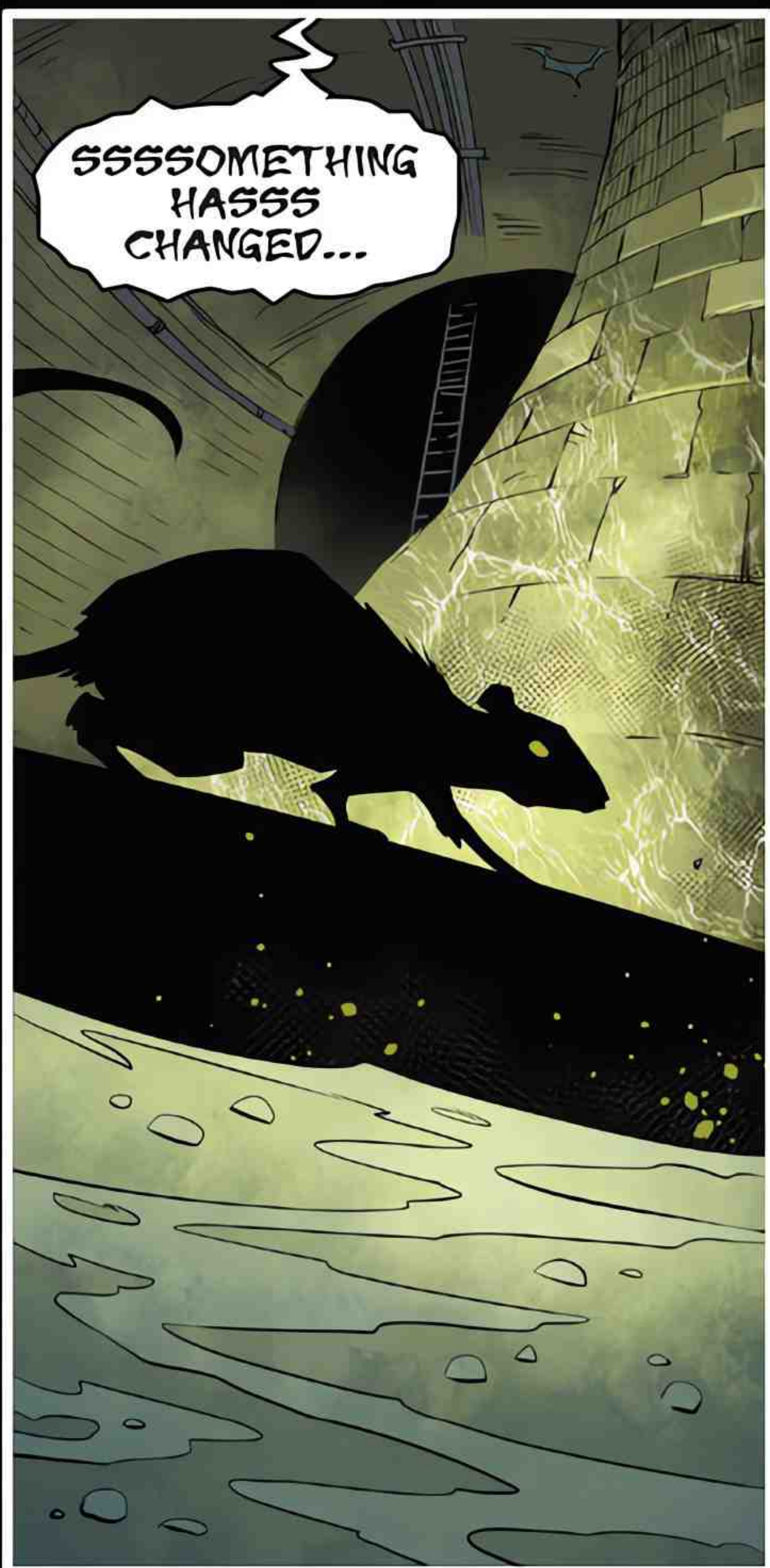
THIS IS
THE MOST **ME**
I'VE BEEN SINCE
THAT DAMNED
ACCIDENT.



JUST DO
ME **ONE** FAVOR,
REED...



...STAY THE
HELL OUTTA
MY WAY.





...IF THAT **SYMBIOTE** IS CAPABLE OF KEEPING THE INTEGRITY OF HIS MOLECULES...

REED...

...THEN IT **SHOULD** BE POSSIBLE TO REMOVE THE SUIT WITHOUT **DESTABILIZING** THEM AGAIN. IF I COULD JUST--



REED, YOU CAN FIGURE OUT HOW TO KEEP BEN HUMAN **AFTER** YOU SEPARATE THEM. BUT THE LONGER THAT **THING** STAYS ON HIM...

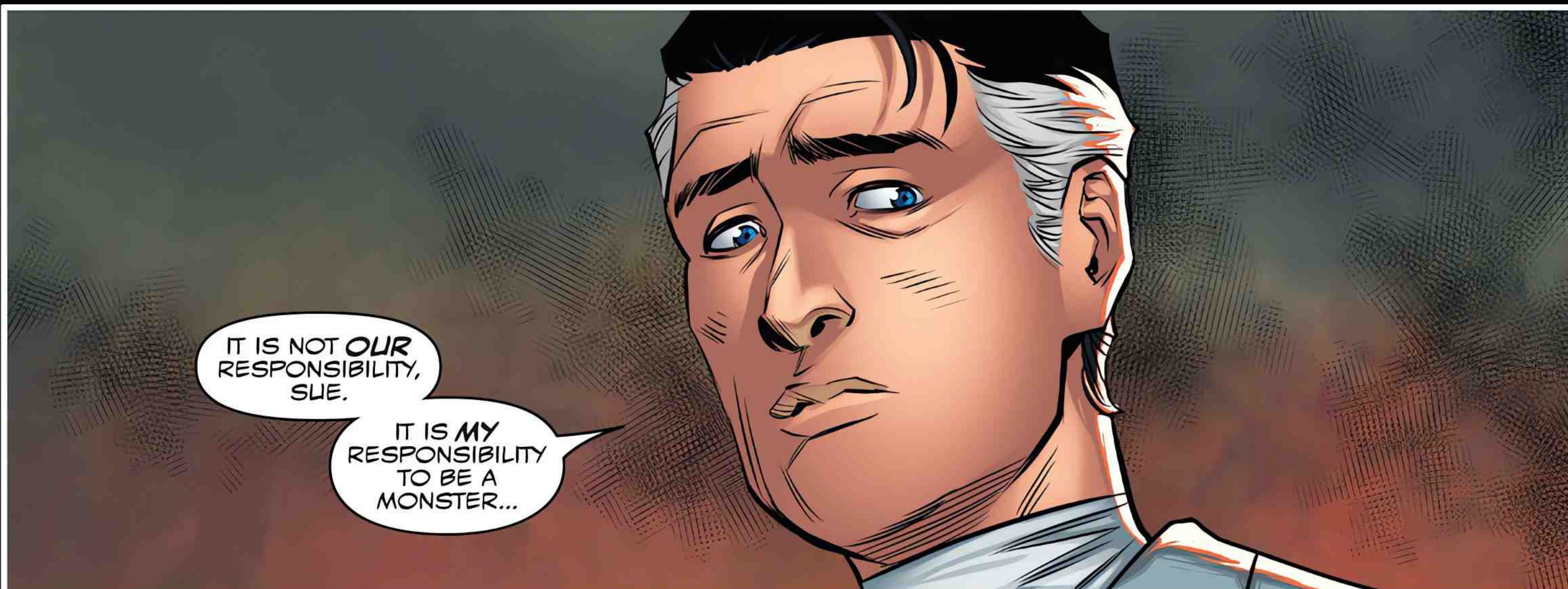
...WE DON'T KNOW **WHAT** IT'S CAPABLE OF.

IT TAPS INTO ITS HOST'S SUBCONSCIOUS... THEIR **DEEPEST** DESIRES.



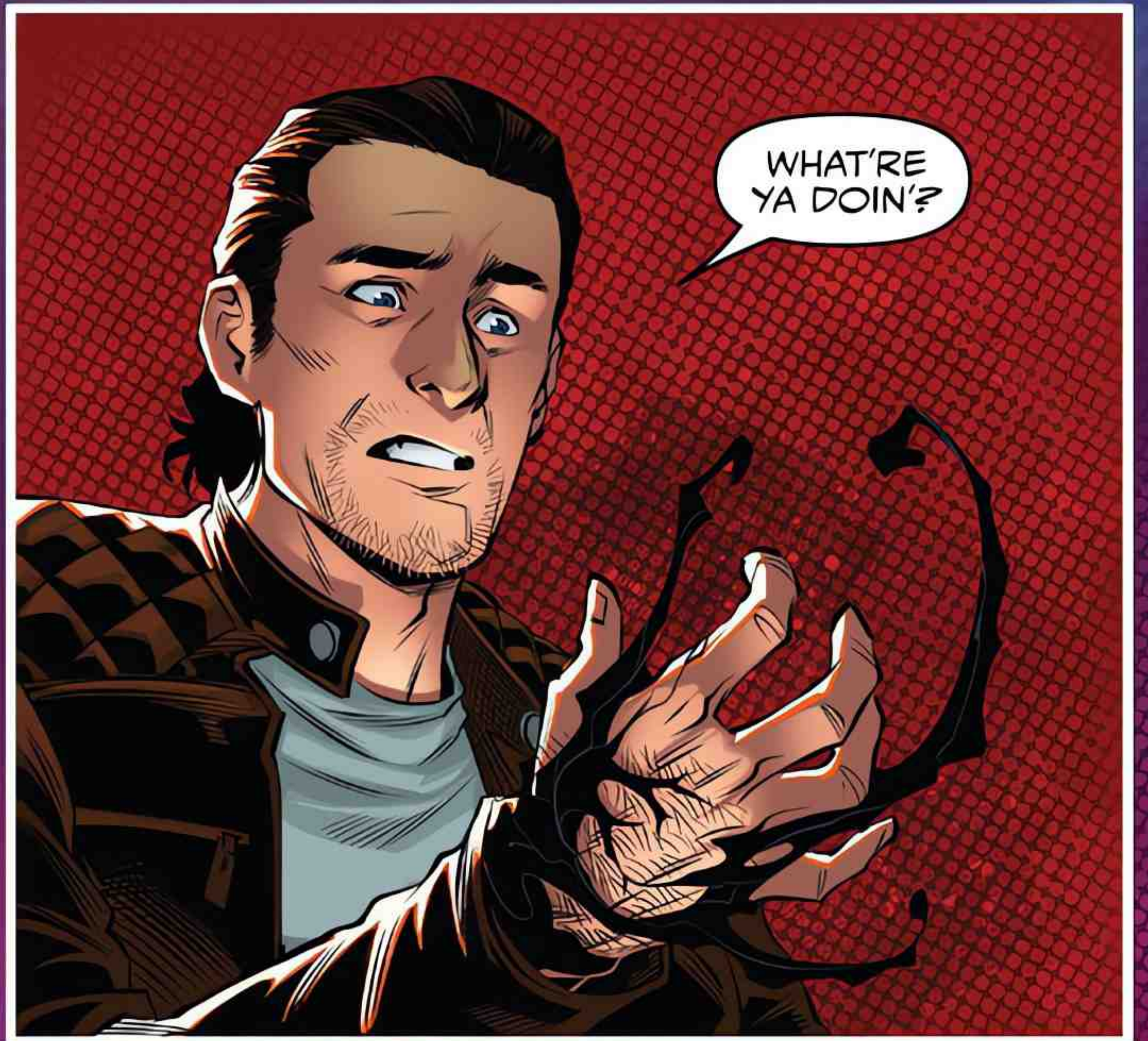
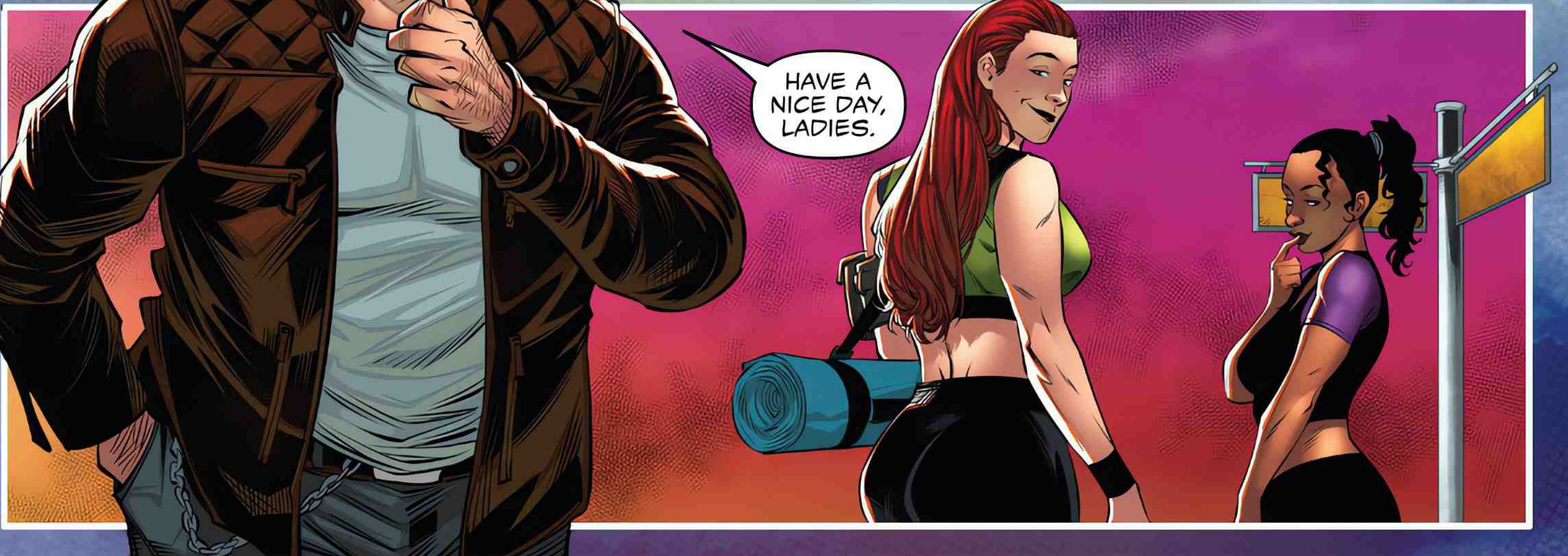
IF I TAKE AWAY THE SUIT, I TAKE AWAY THE THING THAT'S GOTTEN BEN THE CLOSEST HE'S EVER BEEN TO HAVING HIS DESIRE TO **LOOK** HUMAN BE FULFILLED SINCE THE ACCIDENT.

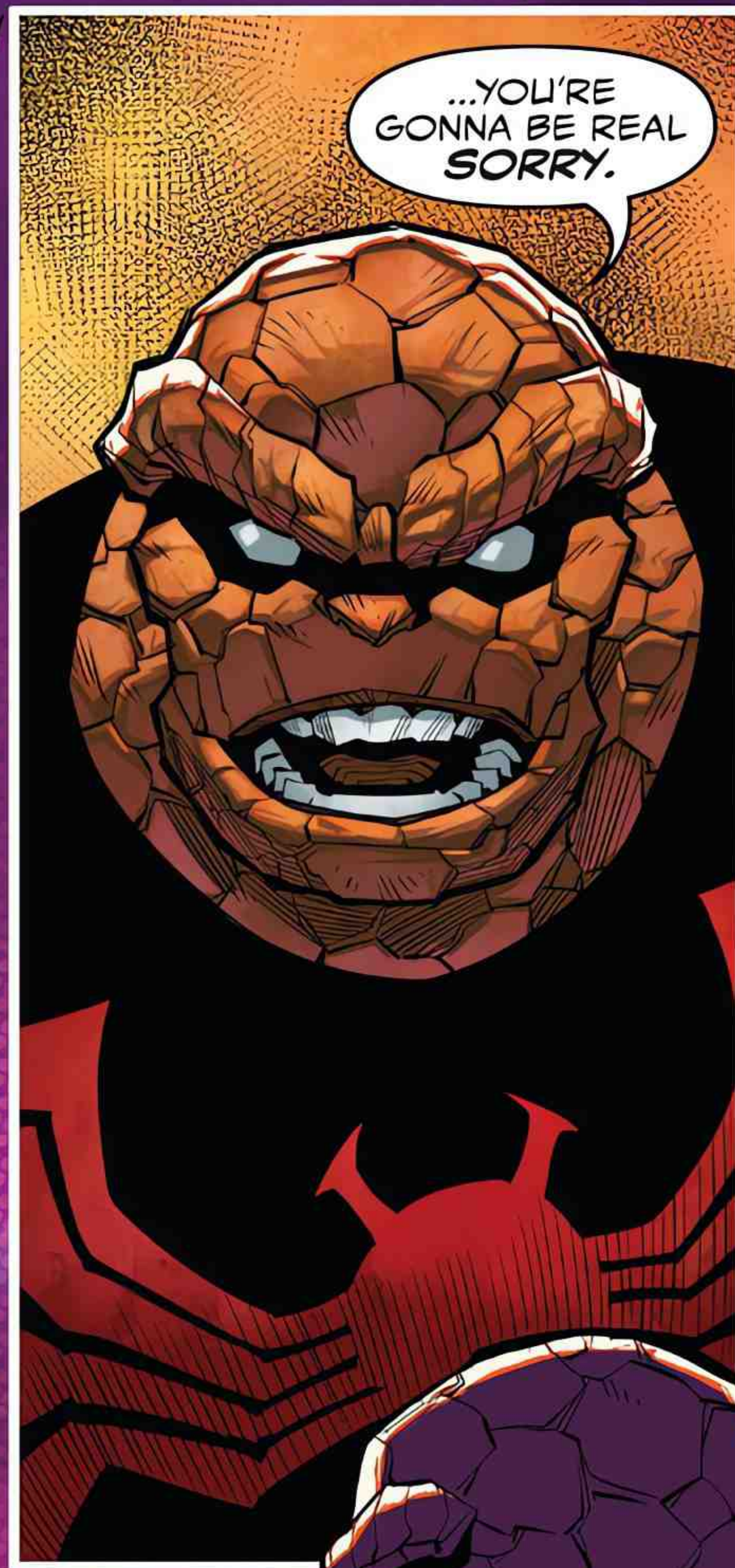
WITH THAT SUIT, BEN IS A **THREAT** TO HIMSELF AND OTHERS. IT IS OUR **RESPONSIBILITY** TO DEAL WITH THAT, EVEN IF BEN DOESN'T LIKE IT.



IT IS NOT **OUR** RESPONSIBILITY, SUE.

IT IS **MY** RESPONSIBILITY TO BE A MONSTER...

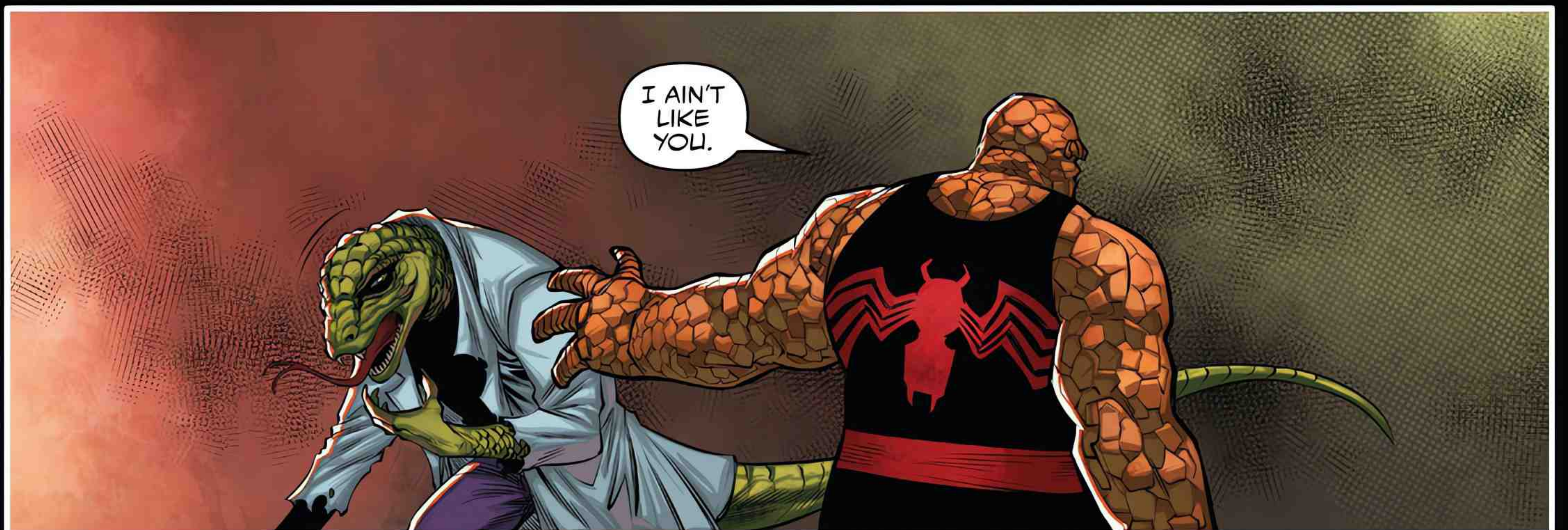
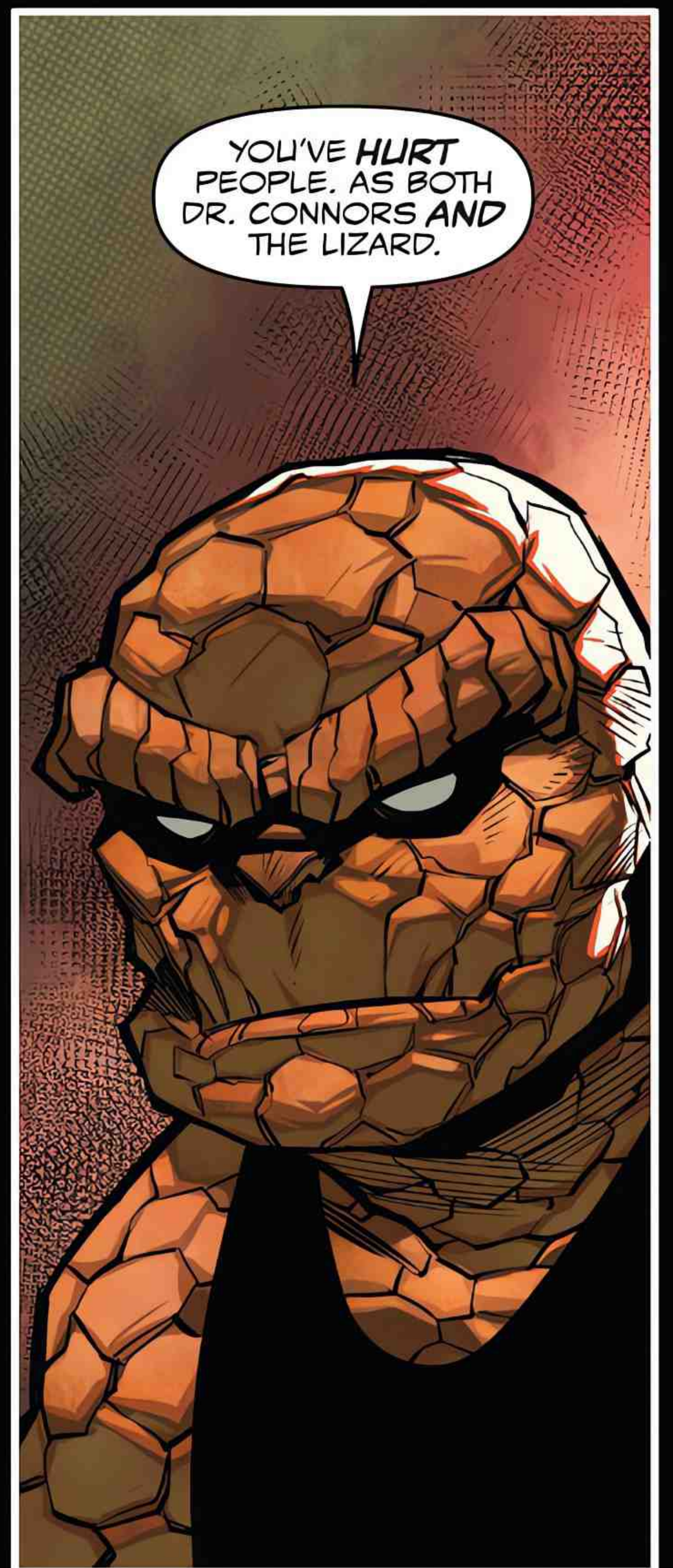
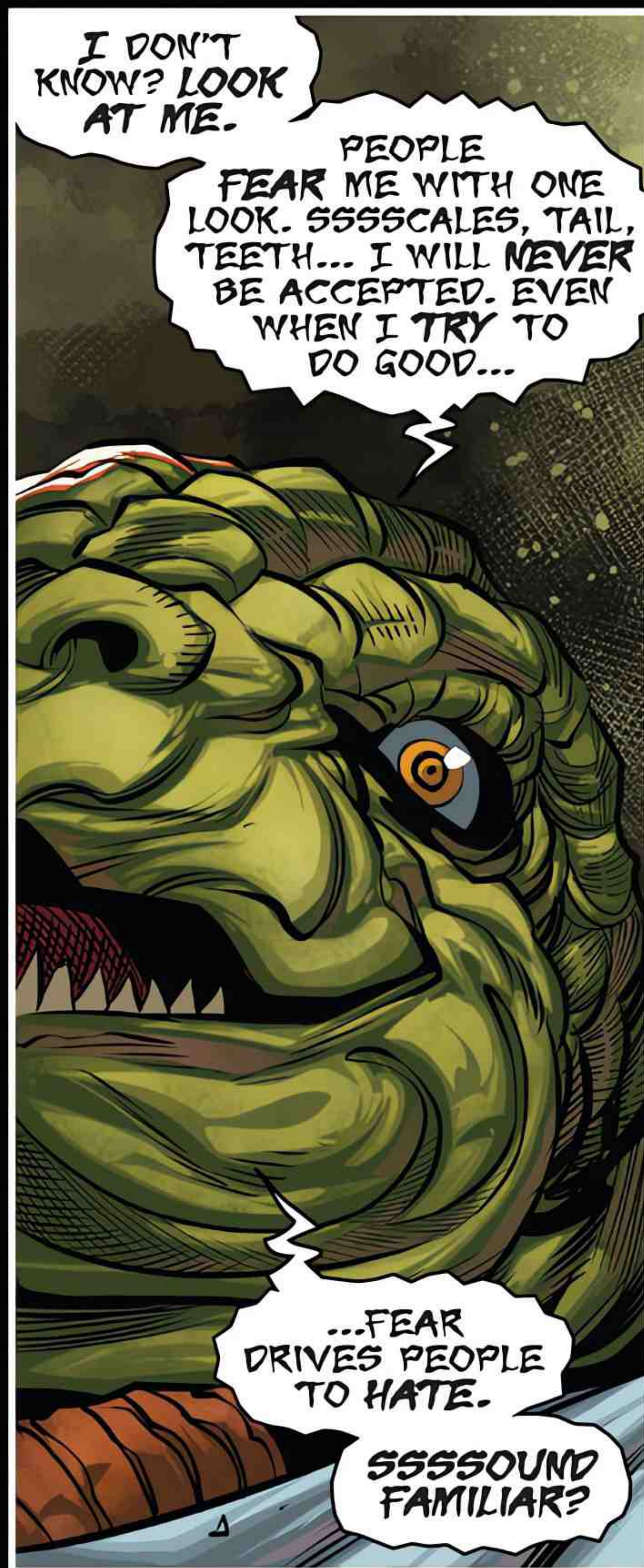






...IT'S
CLOBBERIN'
TIME!





ALL I WANTED WAS TO FIND A WAY TO HELP OTHERSSSS...TO REGENERATE LIMBSSSS.

I USSSED MYSELF AS MY OWN TESSST SSSSUBJECT, AND I SSSSUCCEEDED...

...BUT NO ONE ELSSSE SEES THIS AS A SUCCESSSS.

AND YET...I'VE NEVER SSSSTOPPED TRYING TO HELP, EVEN WHEN THE FANTASSSTIC FOUR MISSSUNDERSTAND MY INTENTIONS... EVEN WHEN THE WORLD HATES ME.

YOU ALSSSO WANT TO HELP.

AND THAT SUIT...THE ONE THAT HAS CURED YOUR CURSE...THAT COULD HELP THOUSSSSANDS OF PEOPLE.

YA THINK...?

I KNEW THERE WAS SSSSOMETHING SSSSPECIAL ABOUT SSSSPIDER-MAN'S SSSSUIT WHEN WE LEFT BATTLEWORLD... I JUST DIDN'T KNOW HOW SSSSPECIAL.

SSSSHARING YOUR CURE IS WHAT A HERO WOULD DO.

AND I CAN HELP YOU DO IT...

"...I CAN HELP
YOU SHARE
THISSSS GIFT."

YOU SURE
ABOUT THIS,
DOC? YOU'VE
TESTED
IT...?

REED ALWAYS
SAID ANY GOOD
EXPERIMENT MUST
BE TESTED AT
LEAST--

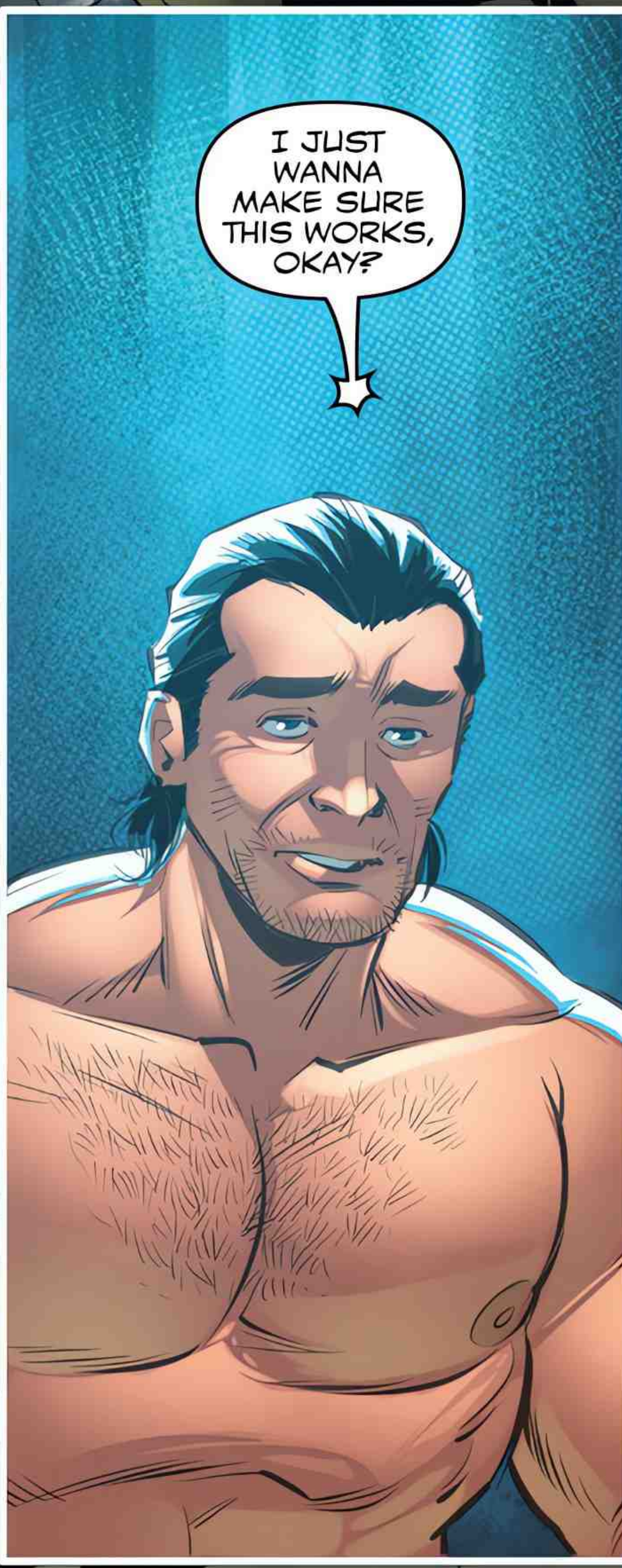


LISSSSTENING TO
REED RICHARDSSSS
HASSSS ONLY CAUSED
PROBLEMS.

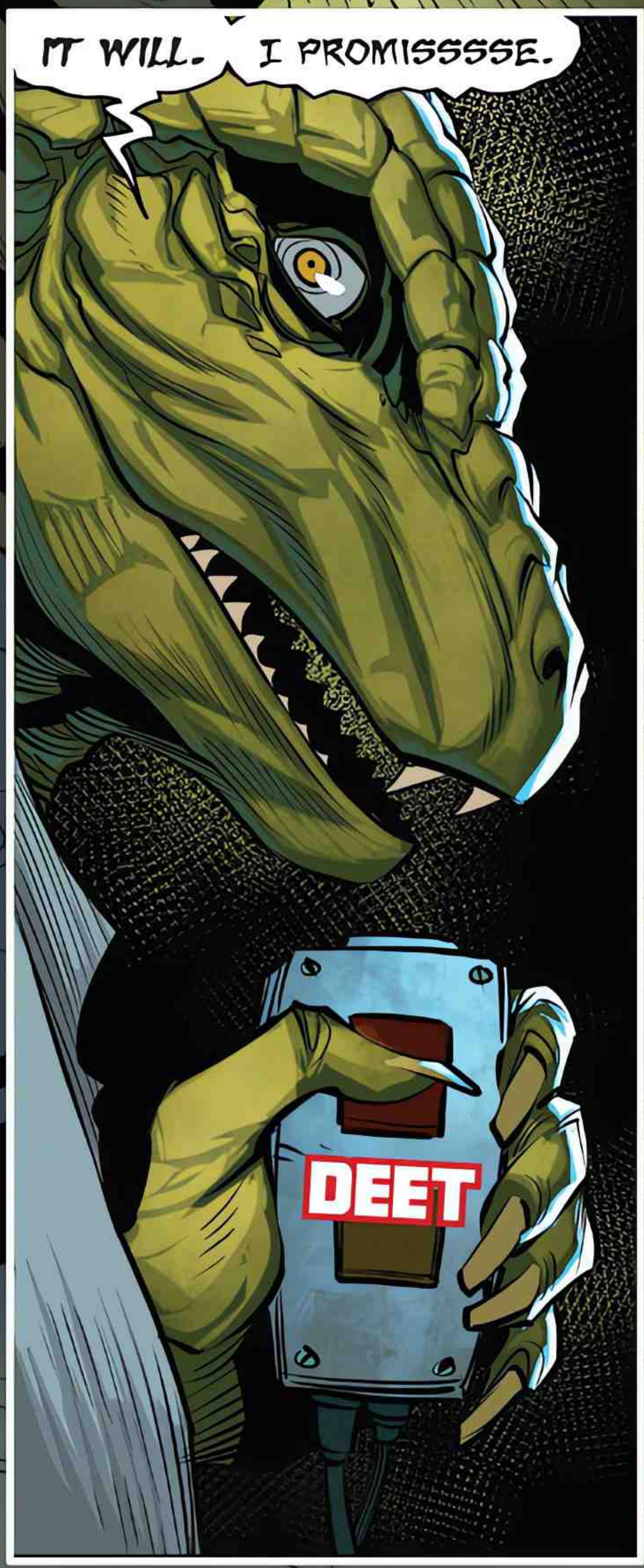
LISSSSTENING TO
REED RICHARDSSSS
TURNED YOU INTO A
MONSSSTER.

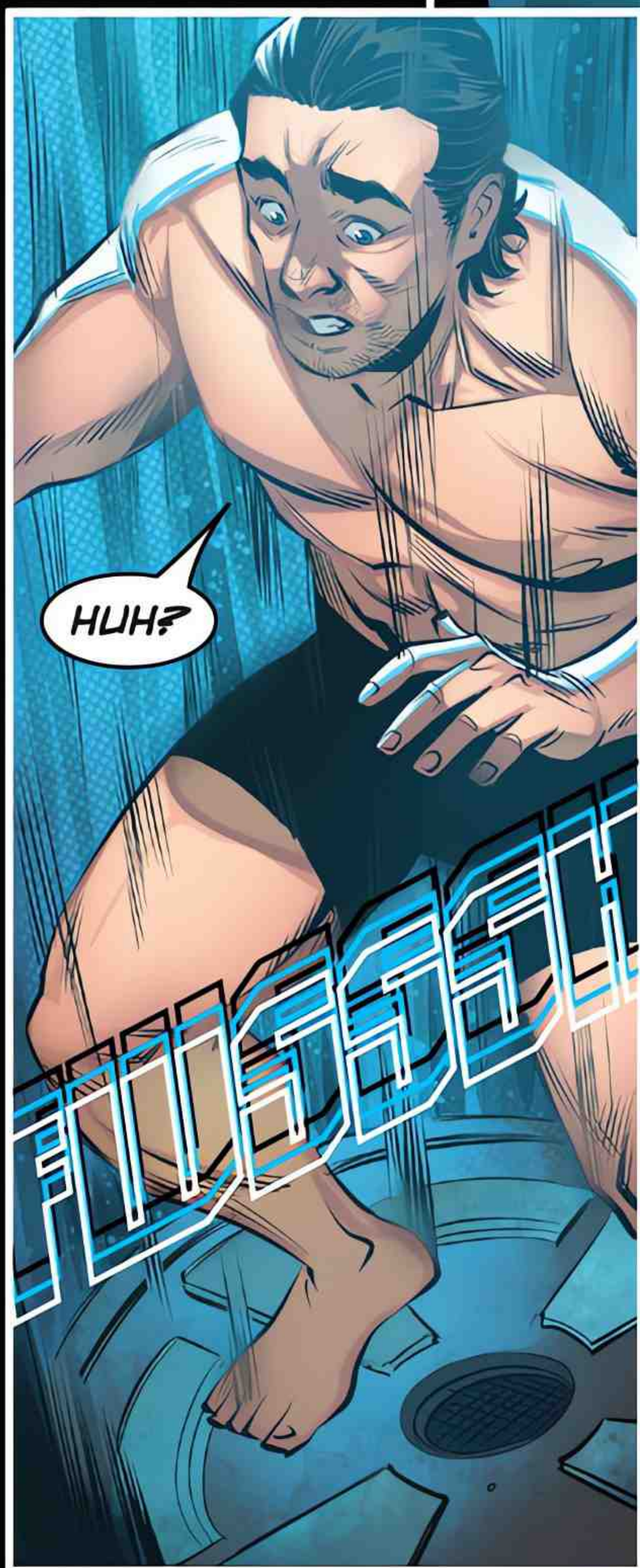


I JUST
WANNA
MAKE SURE
THIS WORKS,
OKAY?



IT WILL. I PROMISSSSSE.





ARGH!
DOC...
TURN IT...
OFF!

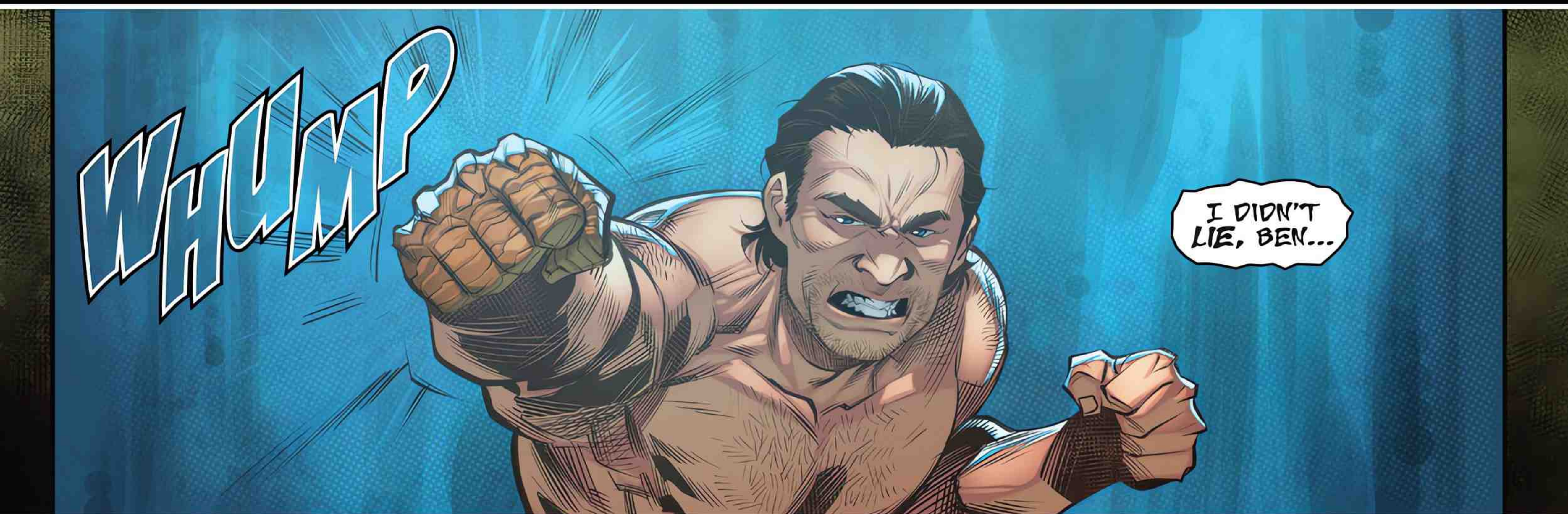


I SAID I WOULD HELP YOU
SSSSHARE YOUR GIFT.

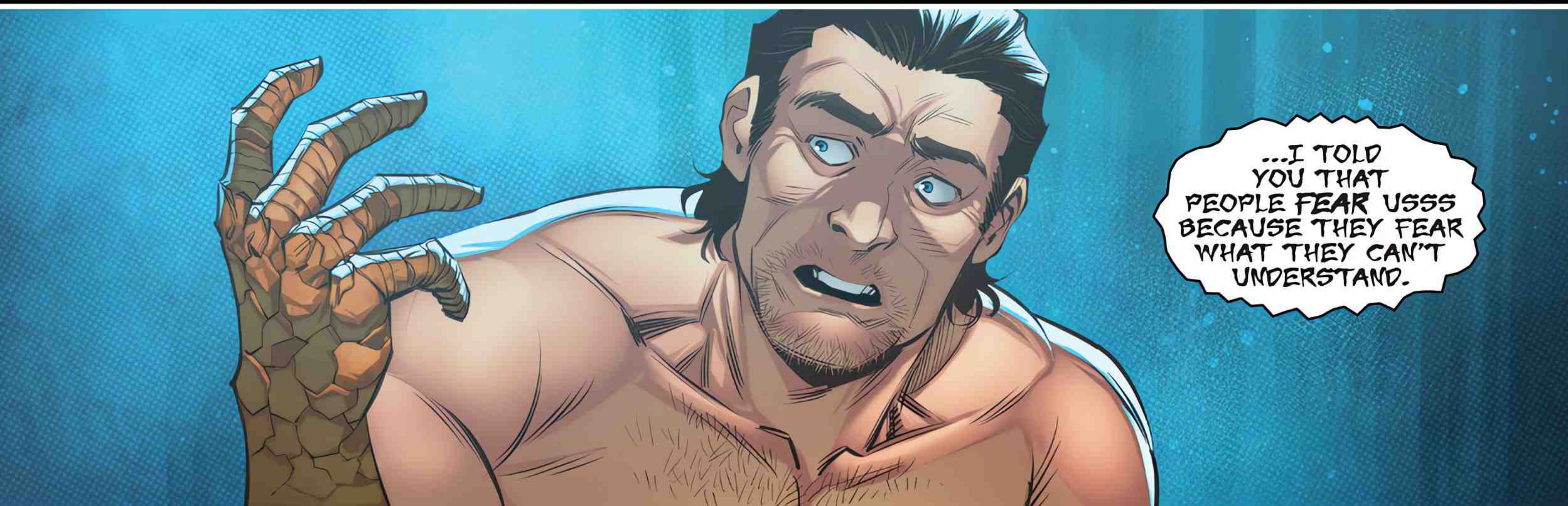


I'D SSSSAY I'VE
SSSSUCCEEDED.

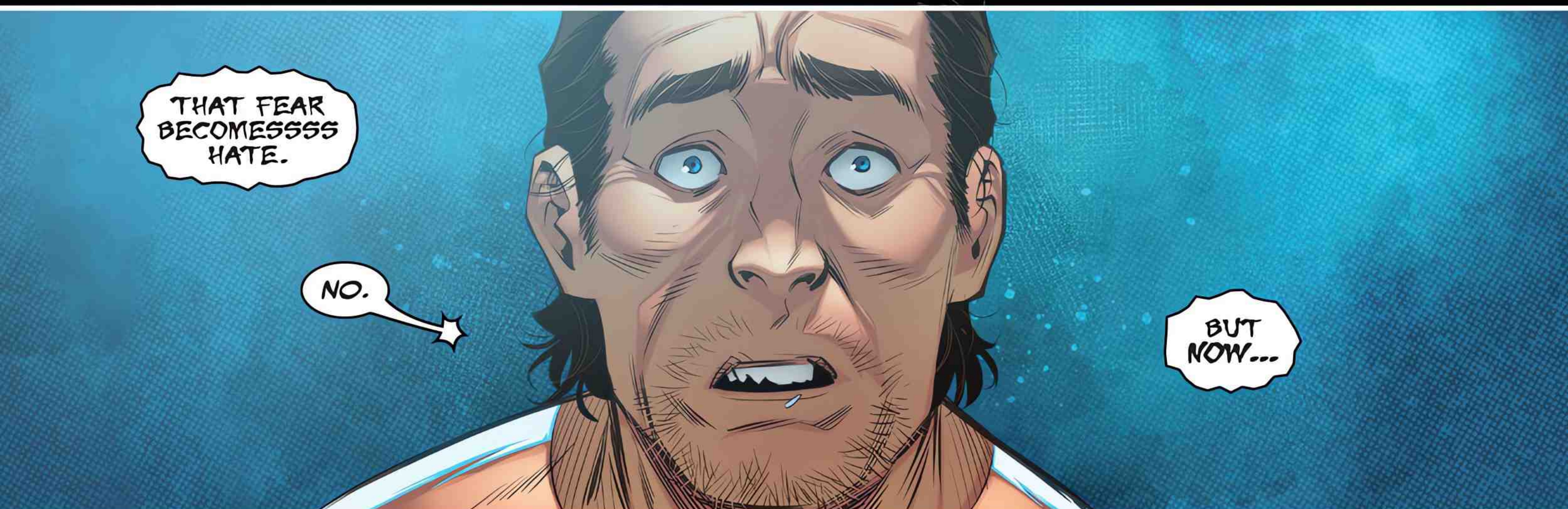




I DIDN'T
LIE, BEN...



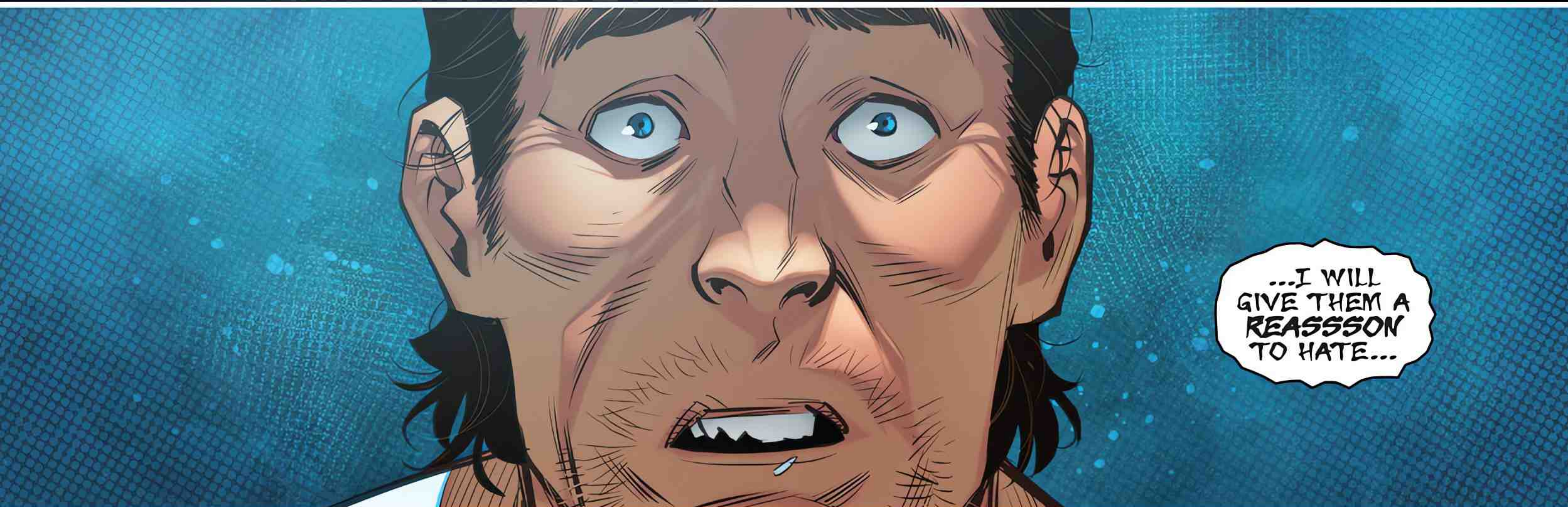
...I TOLD
YOU THAT
PEOPLE FEAR USSS
BECAUSE THEY FEAR
WHAT THEY CAN'T
UNDERSTAND.



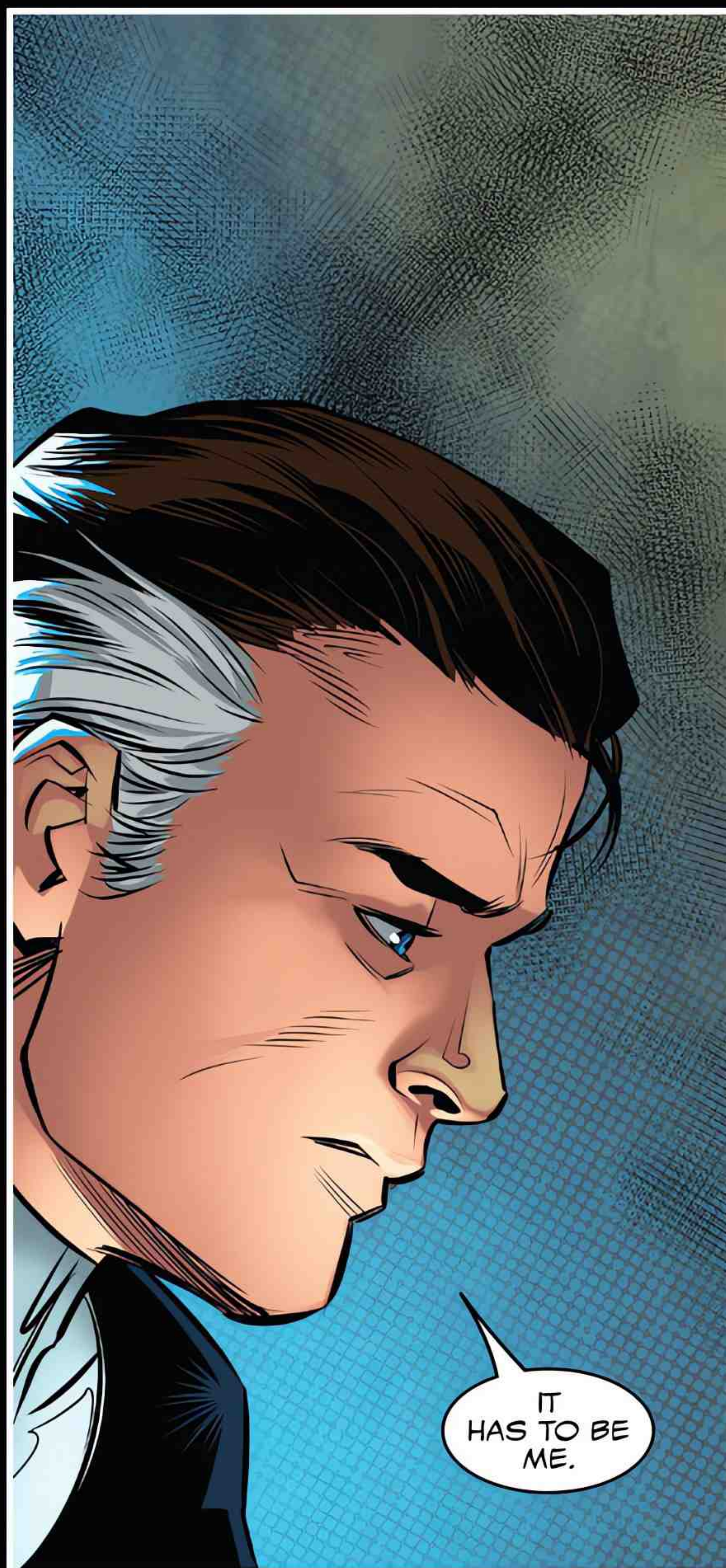
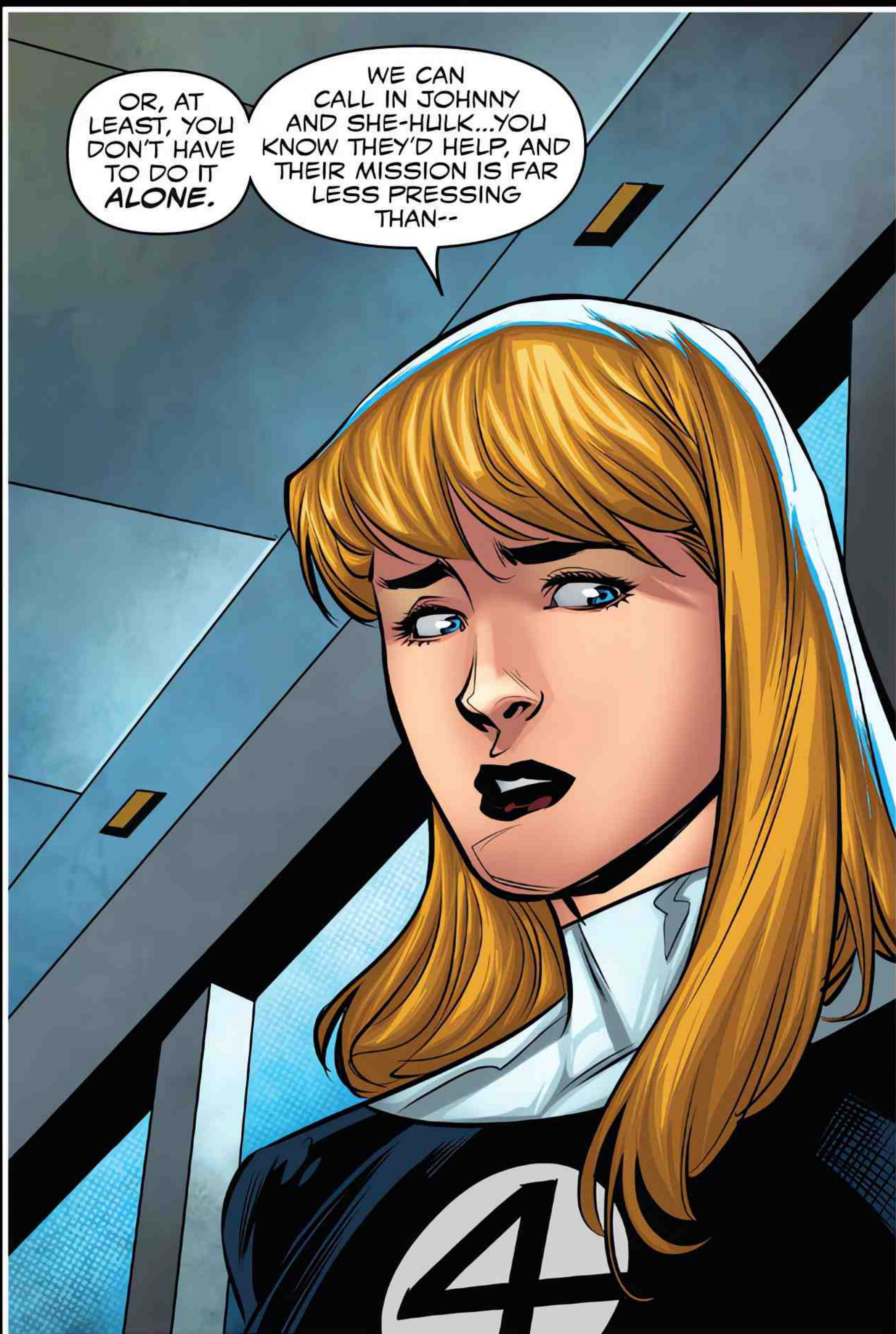
THAT FEAR
BECOMESSSS
HATE.

NO.

BUT
NOW...



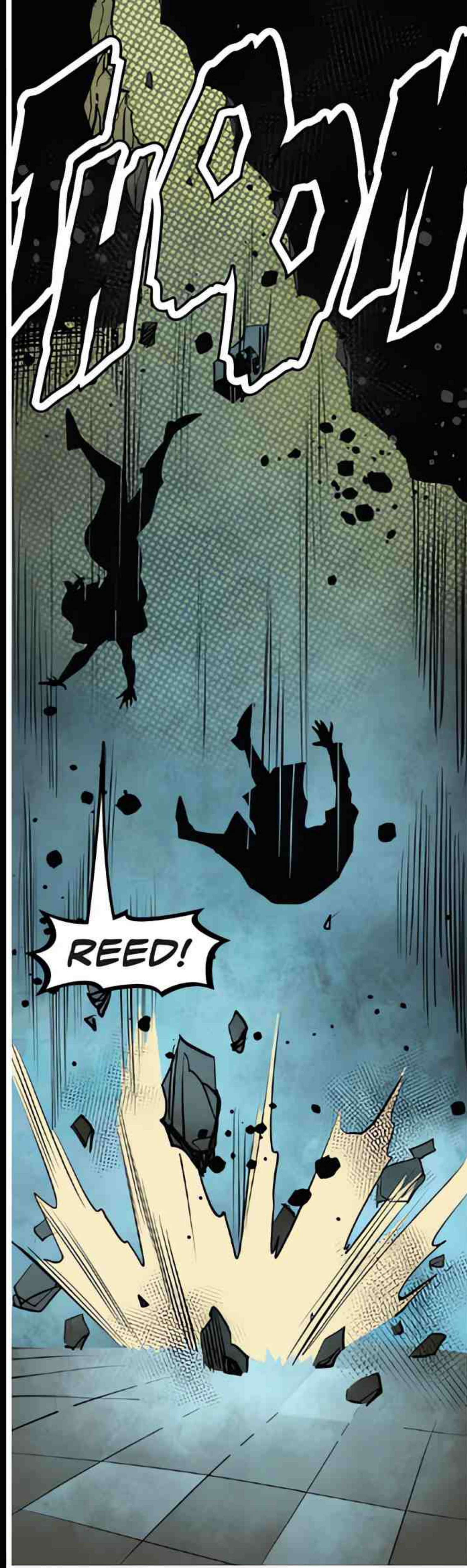
...I WILL
GIVE THEM A
REASSON
TO HATE...

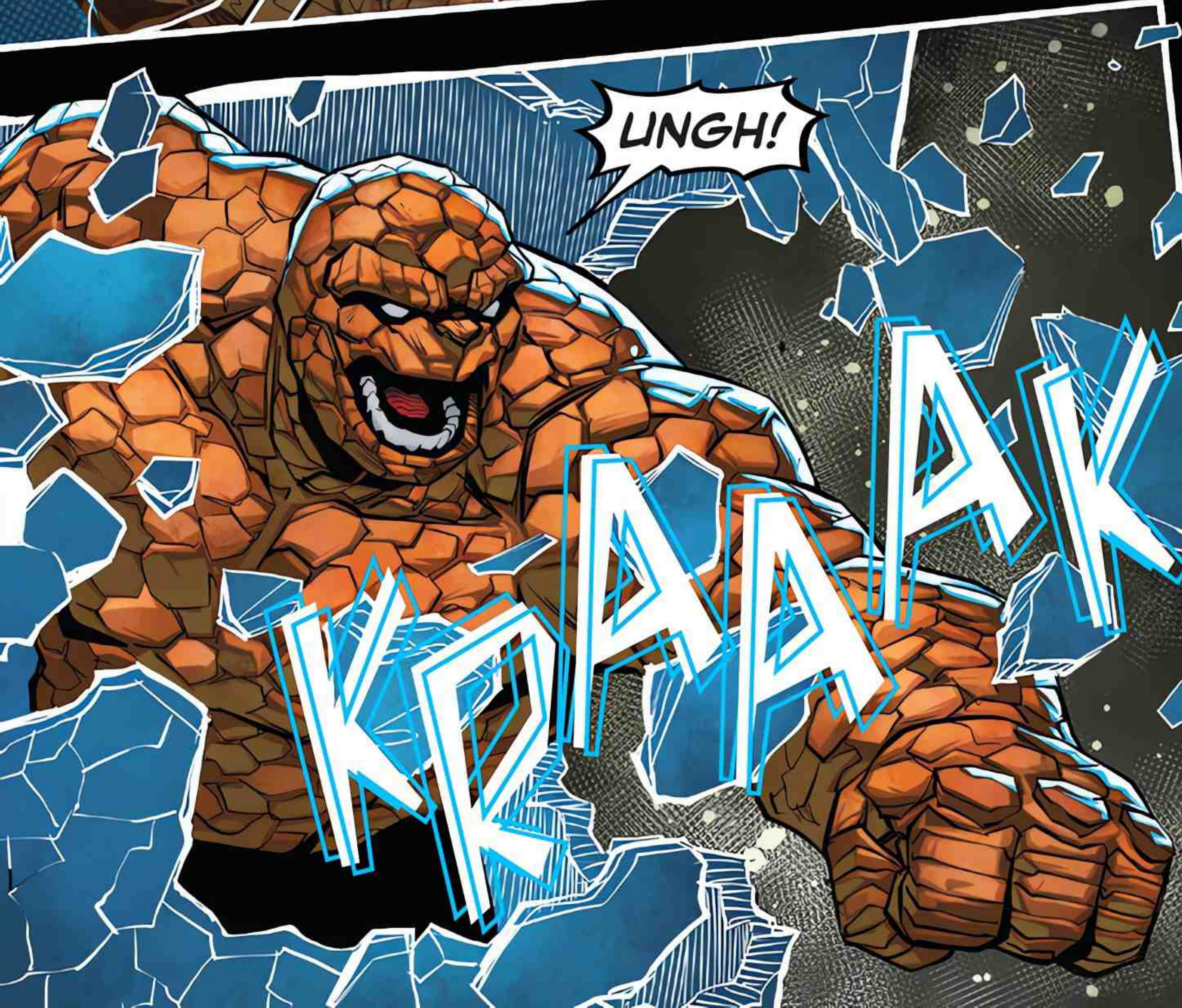
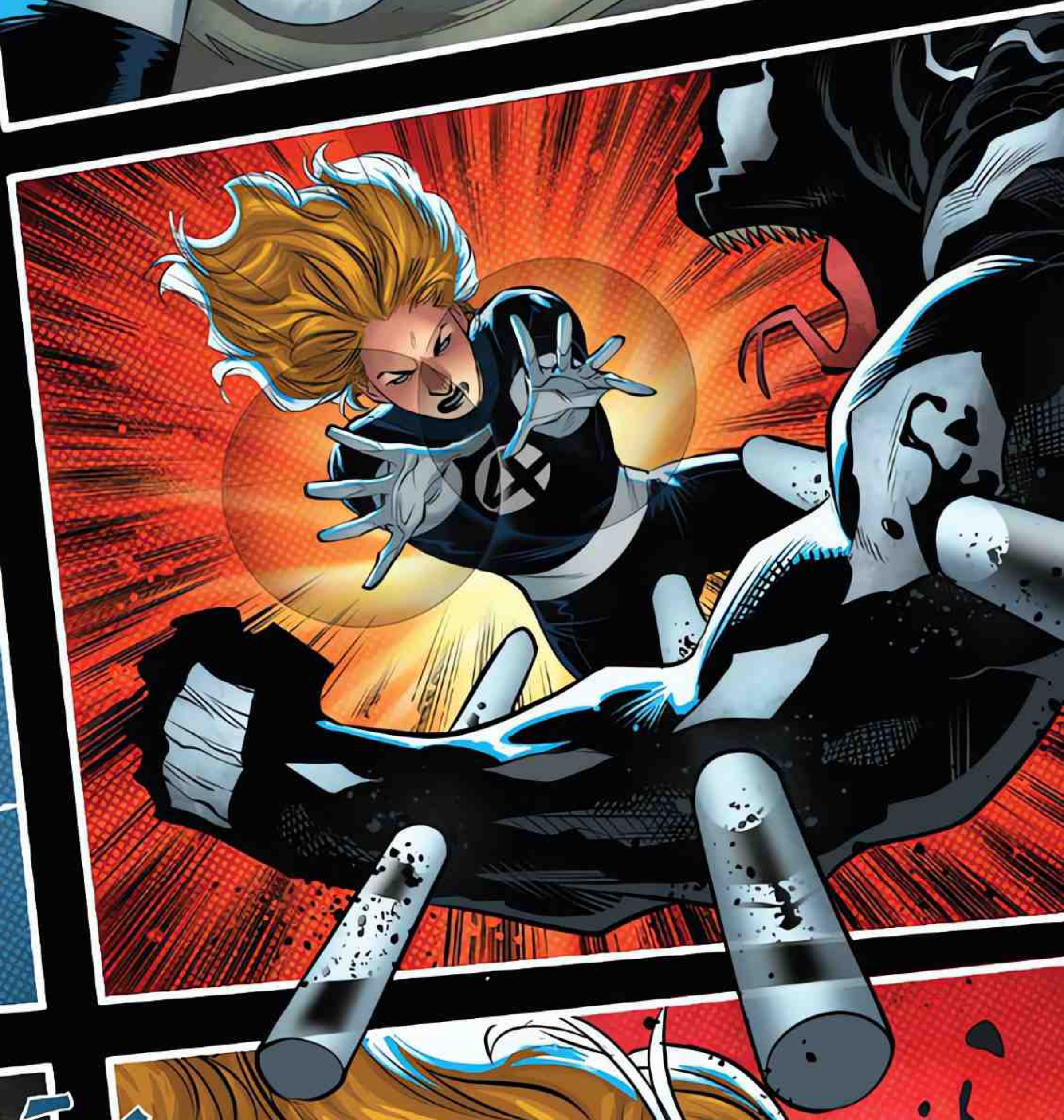






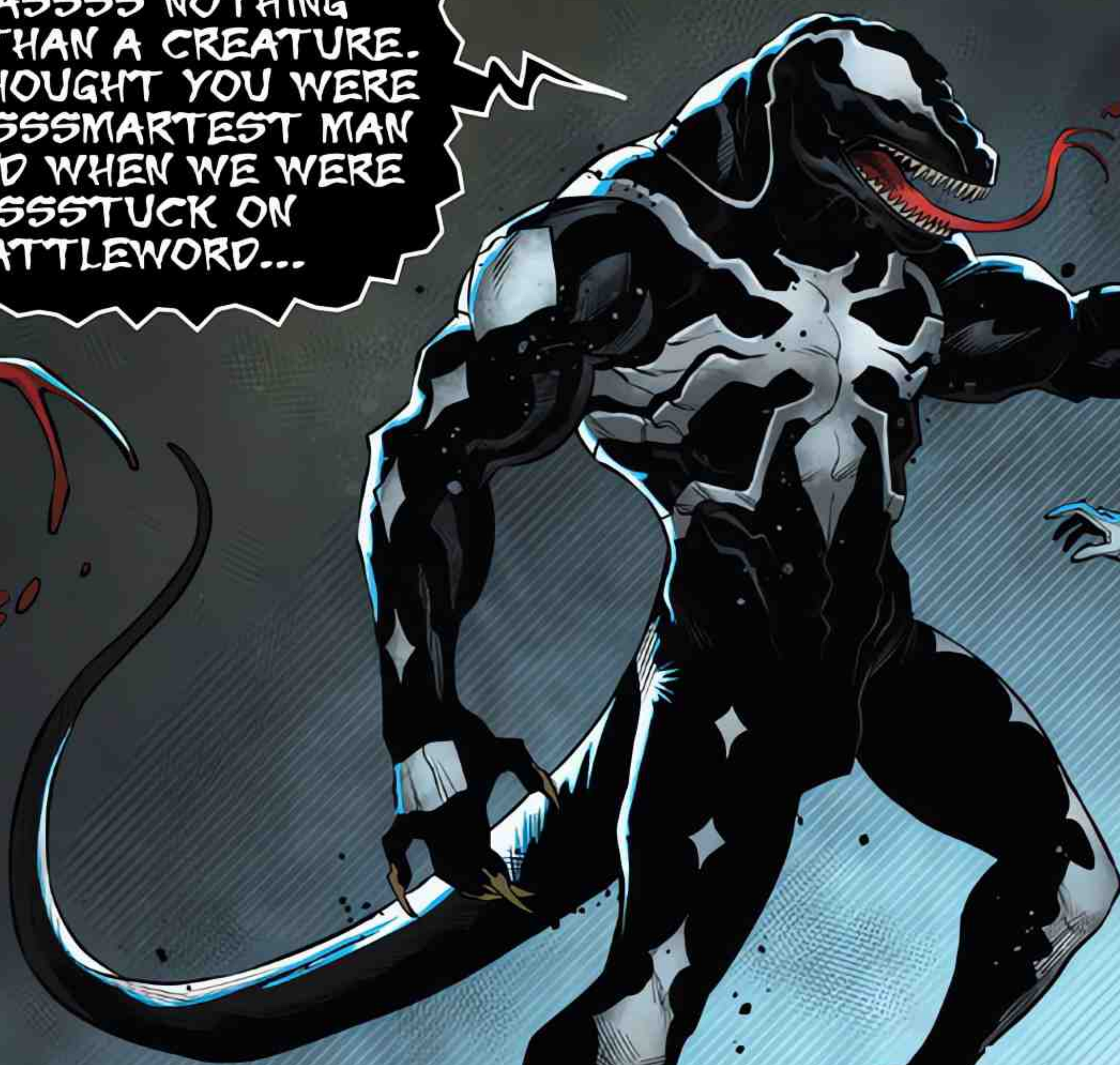
HELLO, REED
RICHARDSSSSSSS.





HrSssss!

YOU THOUGHT
I WASSSS NOTHING
MORE THAN A CREATURE.
YOU THOUGHT YOU WERE
THE SSSSMARTEST MAN
AROUND WHEN WE WERE
SSSTUCK ON
BATTLEWORD...



YOU DON'T
SSSSEEM SO
SSSSSMART--

NO...



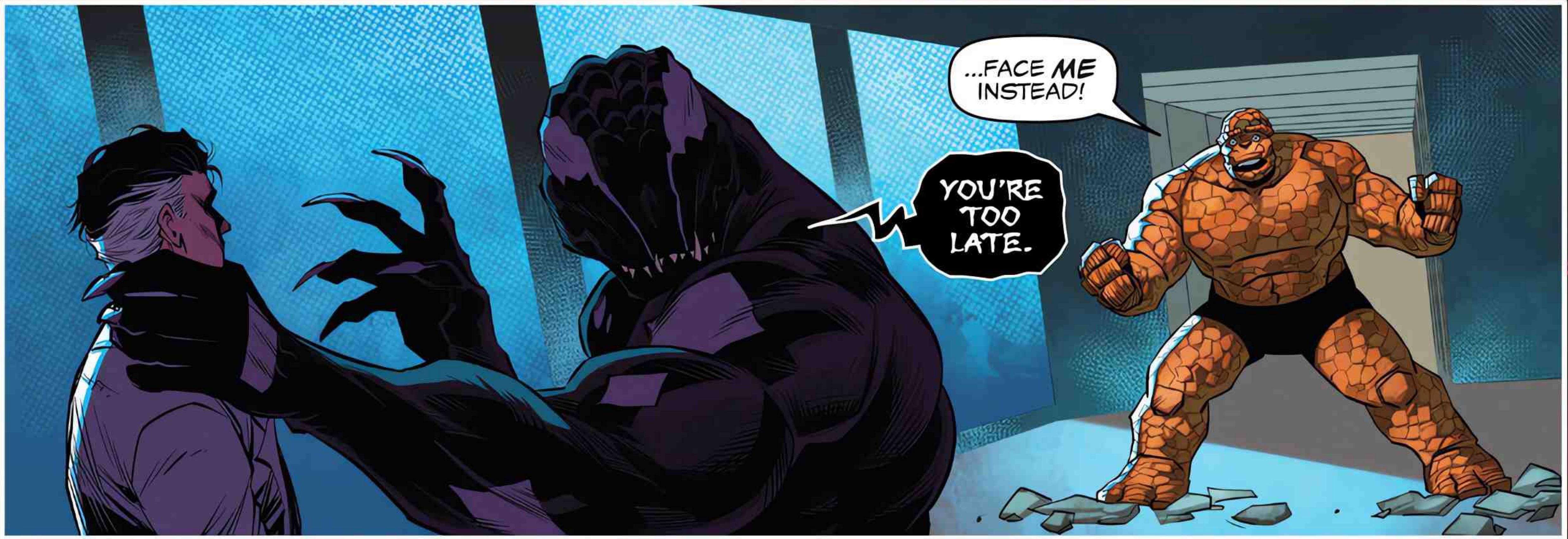
CHOMP

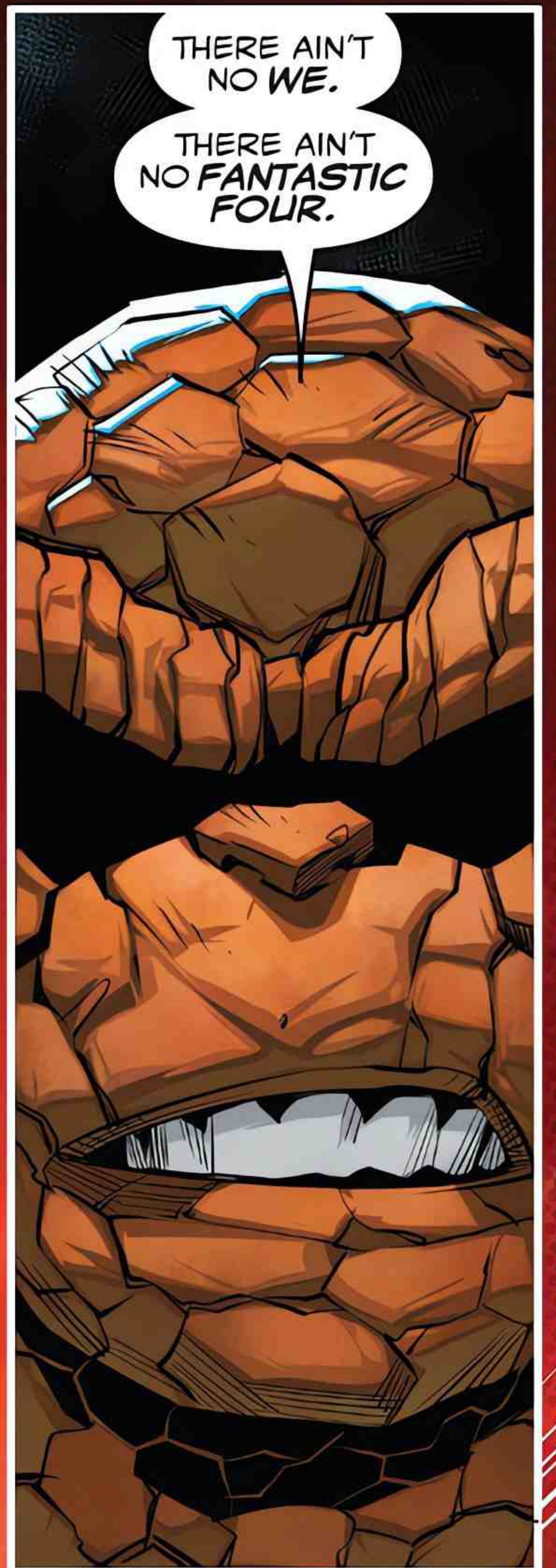
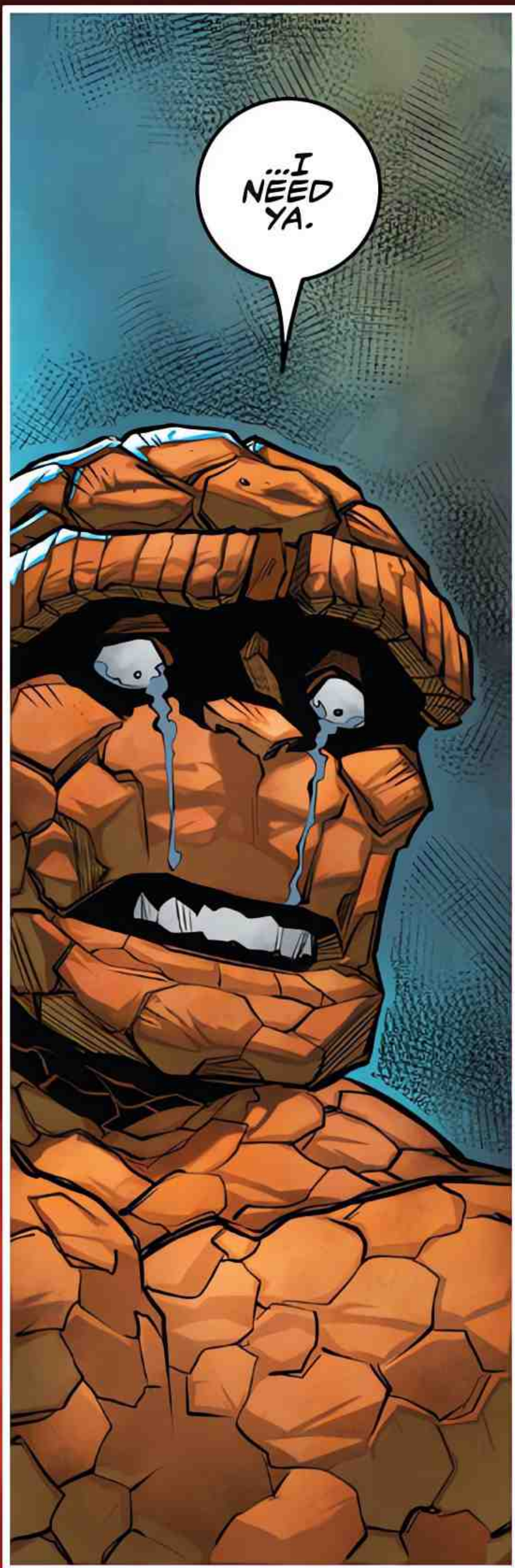
-KAFF-...
H-HOW...?

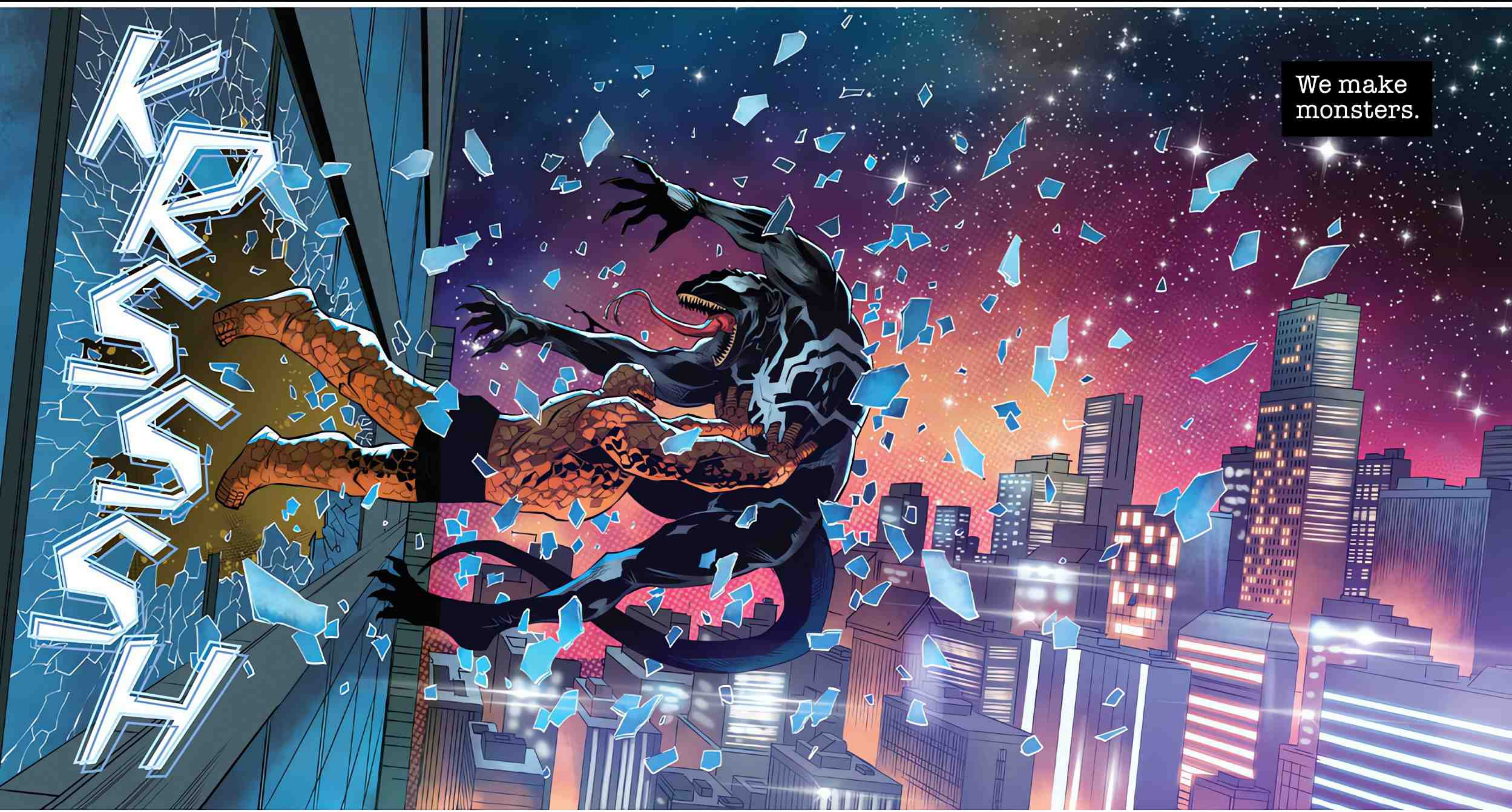
I WILL ENJOY
THISSS.

DR.
CONNORS...





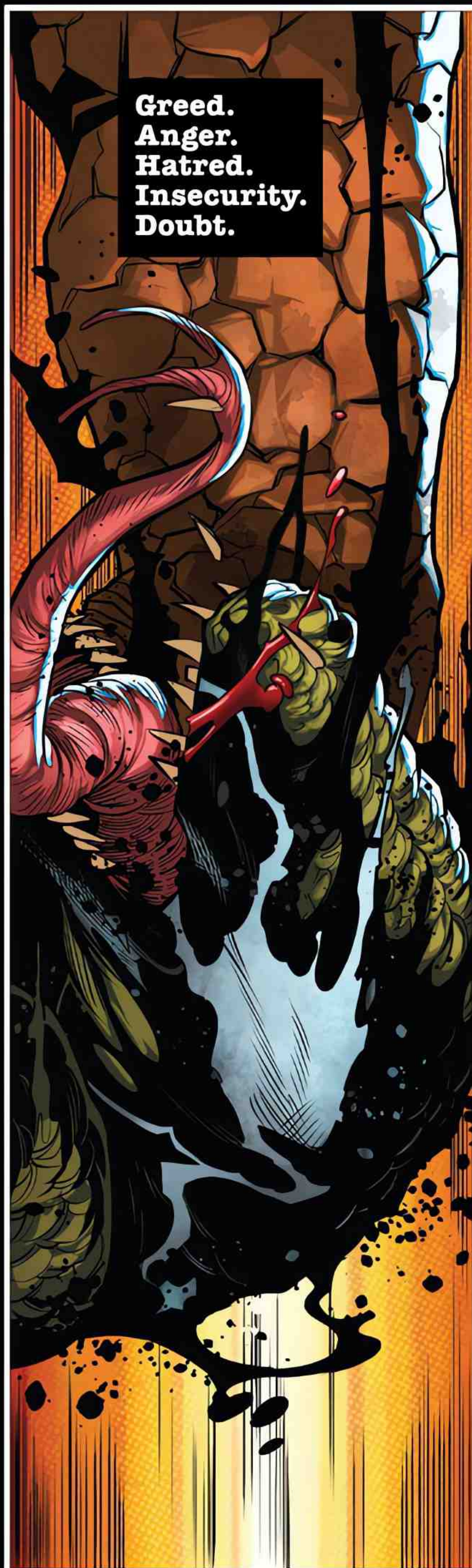




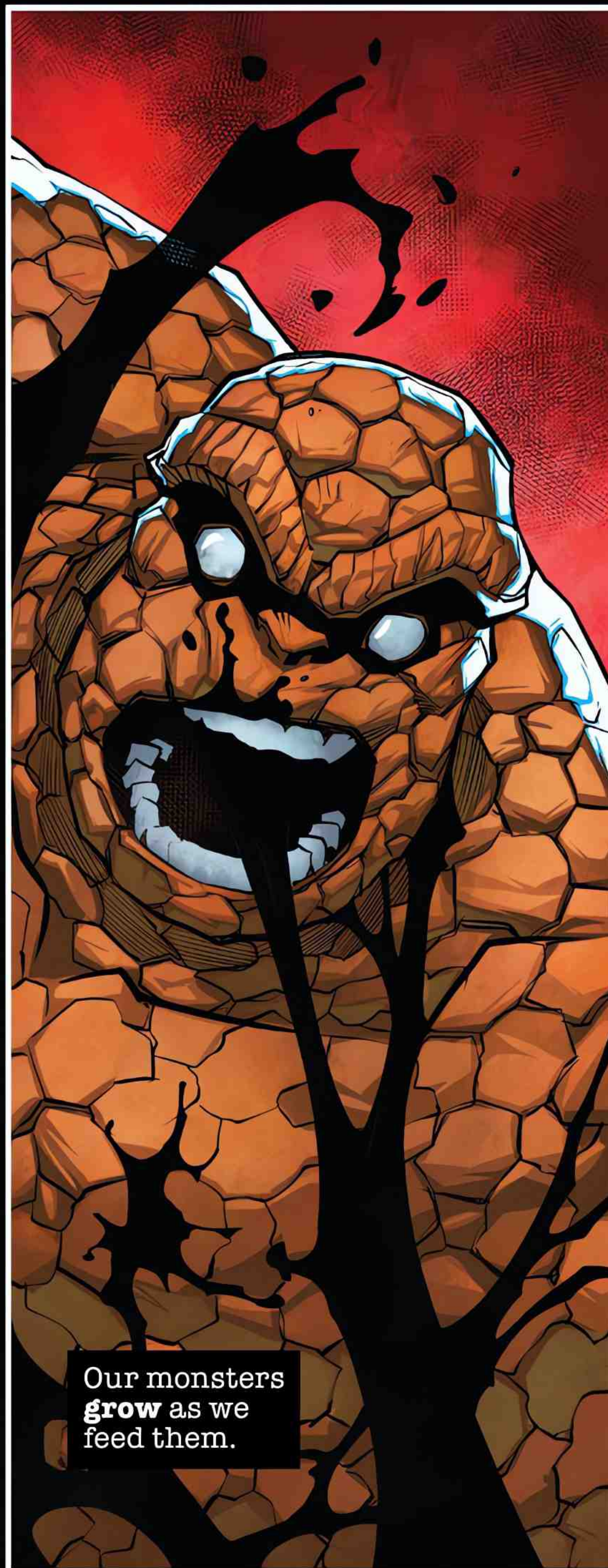
We make monsters.



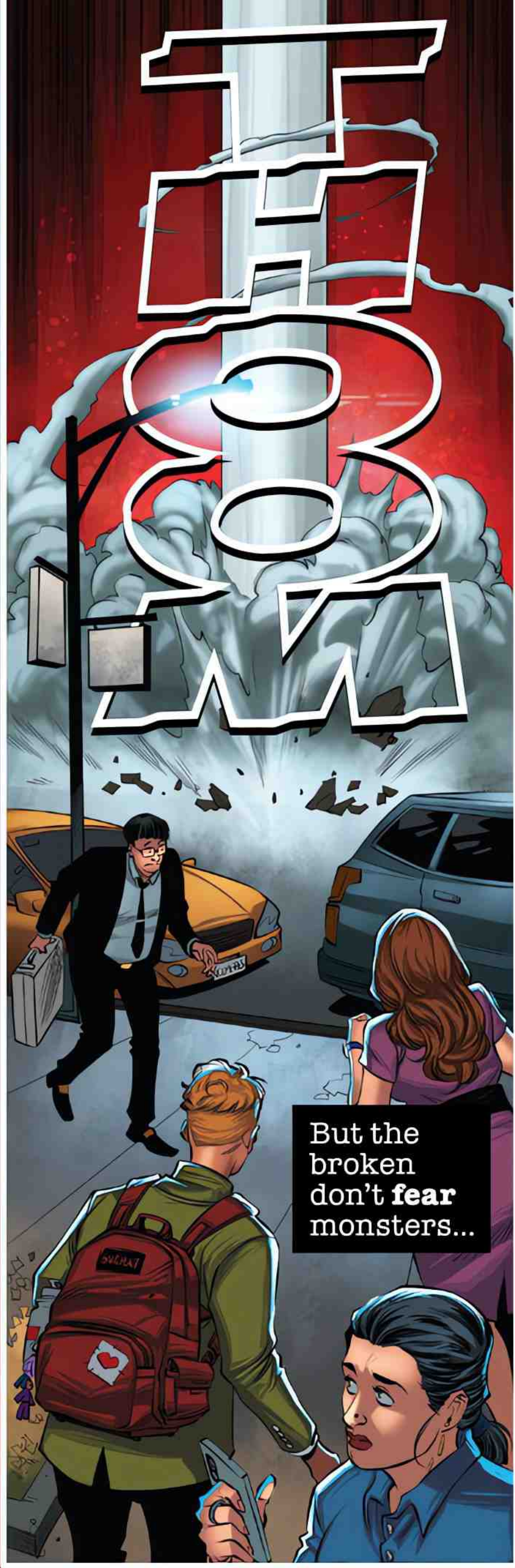
And watch as they hold up a mirror.



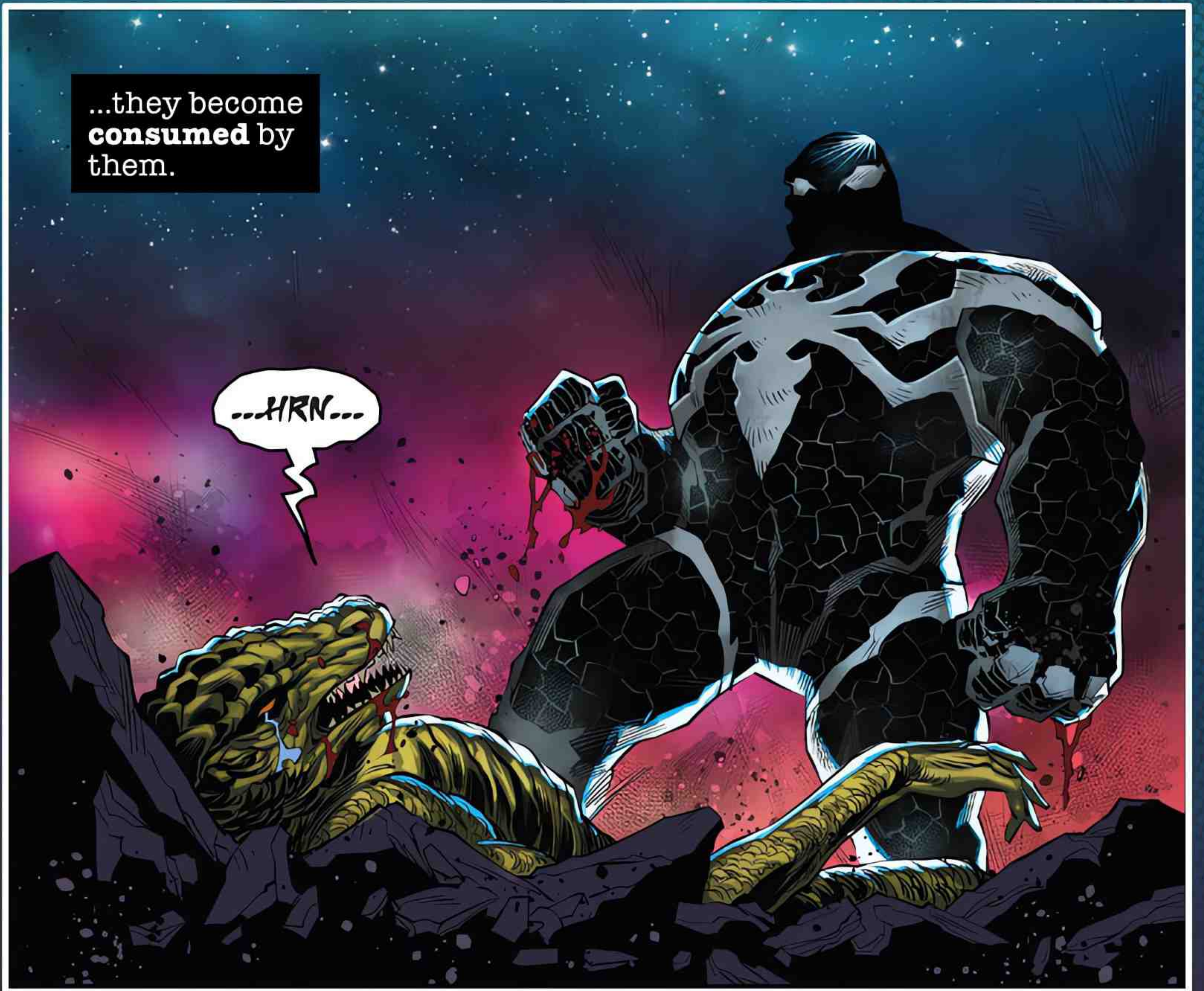
Greed.
Anger.
Hatred.
Insecurity.
Doubt.



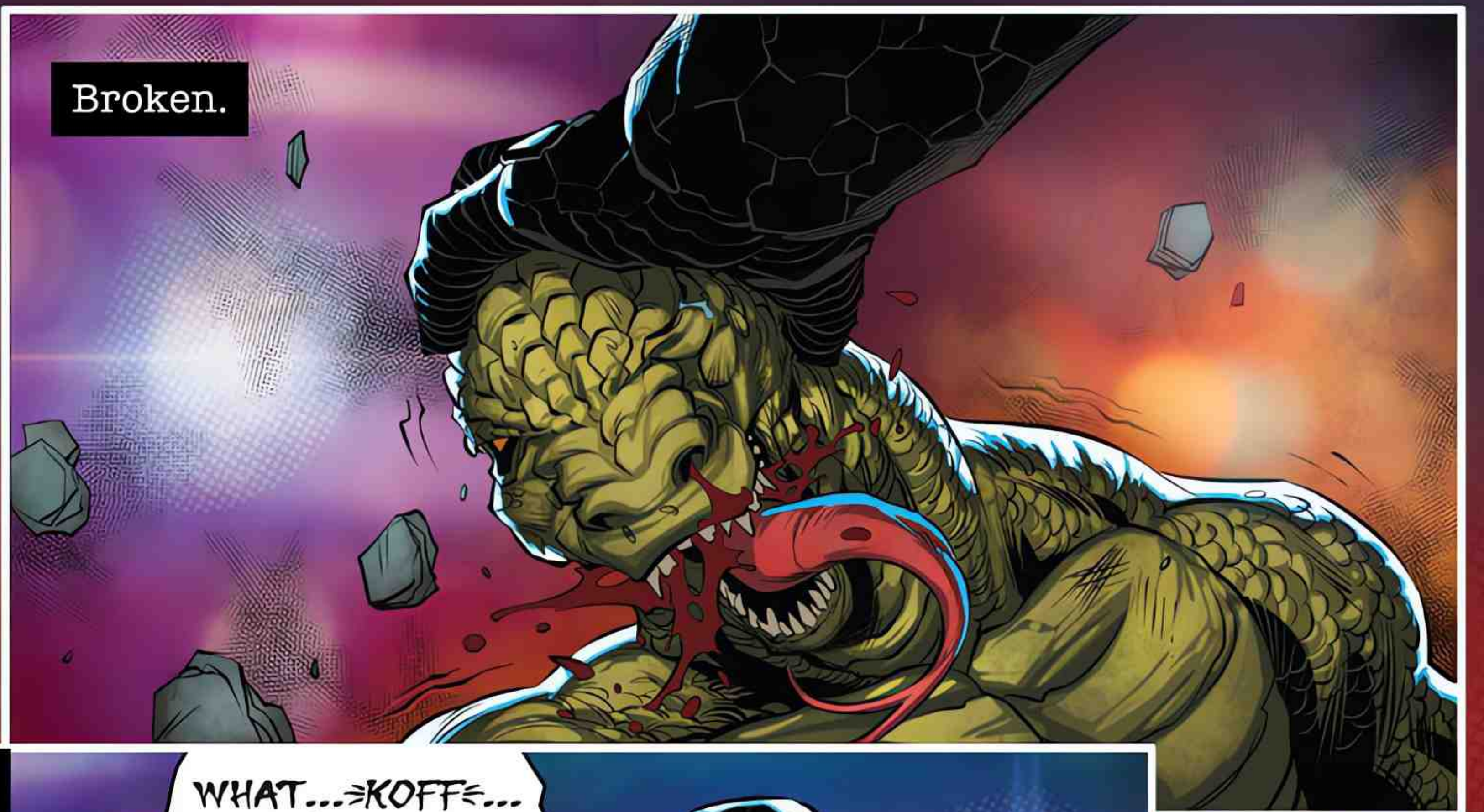
Our monsters **grow** as we feed them.



But the broken don't **fear** monsters...



Broken.



Consumed.



Perfect host.

KRAK



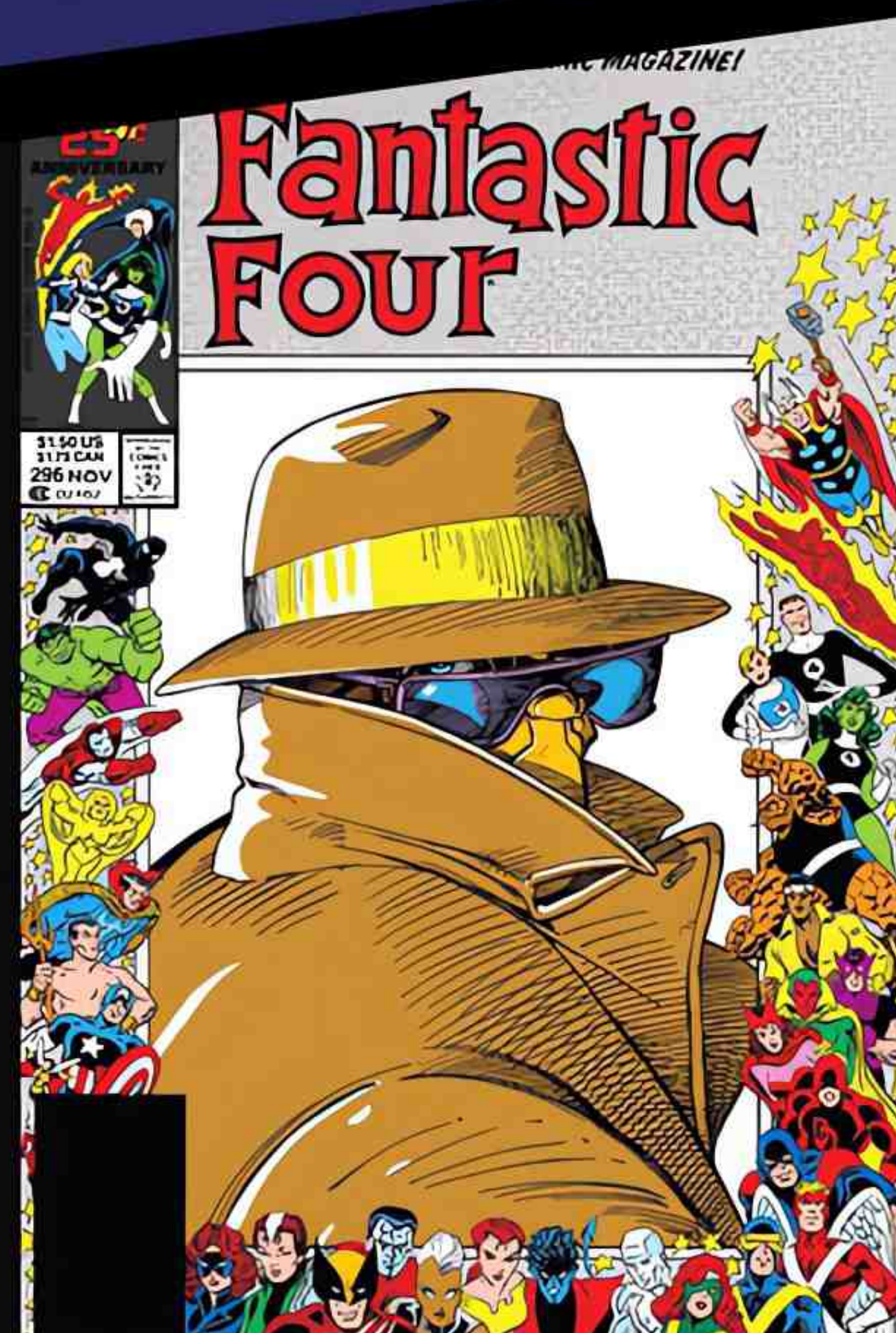
Not more monster than man...



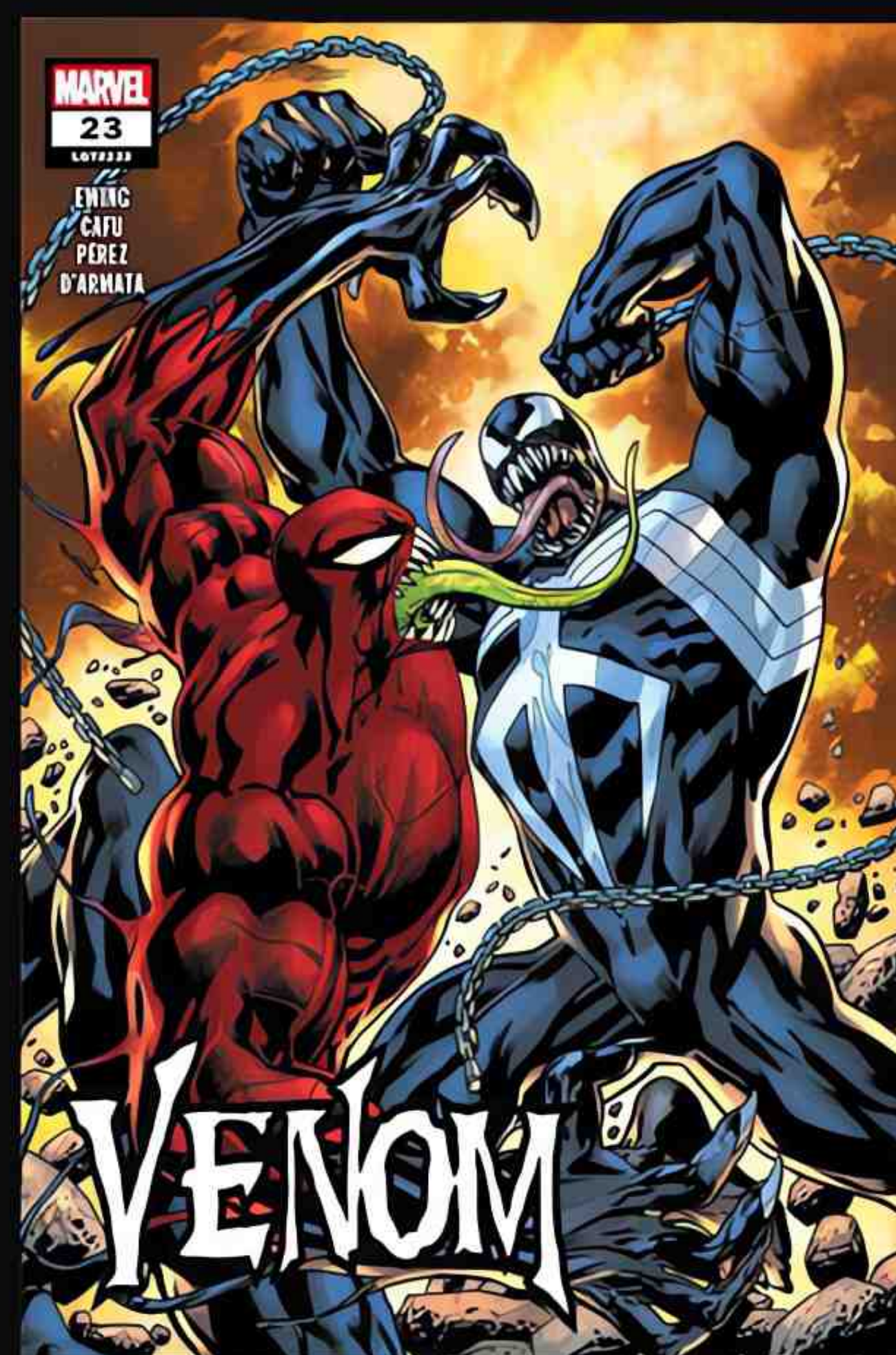
...as man **is**
monster.

NEXT

WHAT IF...? DARK MOON KNIGHT



FOR A CLASSIC TALE AROUND THIS ERA,
CHECK OUT
FANTASTIC FOUR #296!



FOR MORE ONGOING ADVENTURES,
CHECK OUT
VENOM #23
ON SALE NOW!



FOR MORE ONGOING ADVENTURES,
CHECK OUT
FANTASTIC FOUR #9
ON SALE NOW!